

NOT JUST HEAVEN: THE CHURCH'S CALL TO WORK
TOWARD THE WHOLENESS OF MIND,
BODY, AND SPIRIT

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A FINAL PROJECT SUBMITTED TO
THE DOCTORAL STUDIES COMMITTEE
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

UNITED THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY
Dayton, Ohio
May 2020

**United Theological Seminary
Dayton, OH**

**Faculty Approval Page
Doctor of Ministry Final Project**

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ABSTRACT

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The context of this project was the Baptist Pastor's and Minister's Conference of Philadelphia and Vicinity (BPMC) in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. The Great Migration sparked the need for organizations to address the temporal needs of community. While migration rates declined, the need for intervention remained. The project tested the hypothesis that if the members of BPMC are informed of the theological and sociological implications of salvation, their understanding will be positively augmented as to the wider scope of salvation. Using a mixed methods approach, via pre and post-surveys and a focus group, the hypothesis was supported by the research.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am grateful to my doctoral mentors, The Rev. Lucius Dalton, DMin; The Rev. Lisa Weah, DMin; and to The Rev. Rychie Breidenstein, PhD, Faculty Consultant. Each of whom provided encouragement, a good deal of agitation, and an invitation to clarity. To my professional associates, The Rev. Cassandra D. Gould, DMin; The Rev. J. Wendell Mapson Jr., DMin; The Rev. Quintin L. Robertson, DMin; and Marquisha Lawrence Scott, PhD, I am appreciative of your listening ears, your encouragement, and the academic and professional inspirations you are. To my context associates, The Rev. Marsha Brown Woodard, DMin, The Rev. Harry Moore, and the Rev. Myron D. Barnes, DMin, many thanks to you for your willingness to engage with this project, your hospitality, and your investment to make the project happen.

To the members of the Baptist Pastor's and Minister's Conference of Philadelphia and Vicinity, for allowing me to participate, in word, deed, and community to execute this project. I am forever grateful. To my peer associate, The Rev. Shawn E. E. Thomas, I appreciate your collegiality and friendship on this doctoral journey.

To my mother Lynder E. Scott, I am grateful for you and for your sacrifice. I am, because you are. For the friendship, companionship, and nurture of KAO, Kerygma Alpha Omega, I am filled with humility and appreciation. I am truly grateful for the encouragement and support of my lovely wife, Marquisha Lawrence Scott, PhD. I look forward to our continued journey together. I walk with you remembering, "... discipline

always seems painful rather than pleasant at the time, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.”

To God, from whom all blessings flow, be glory in the church and the world.

DEDICATION

To those whose dreams, prayers, hopes, and imagination have brought me thus far
on the way.

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INTRODUCTION

Is heaven all there is? As the reward for those who receive salvation, for those who are born again, is heaven all there is? For those who have learned to live holy, learned how to live right, and learned how to suffer, is heaven all there is? For those who are lost, searching for joy, meaning and fulfillment, is heaven all there is? For those living life on, and in, the margins, without daily bread, without the benefit of societal consideration, is heaven all there is? To be sure, heaven is a prize. The description of the great city of God, conveyed by John, an exile, is one of sheer grandeur. Heaven's dimensions are perfect. Its twelve gates are like pearls. Its streets are paved with gold. Its source of water is central. Its source of light is everlasting. To be sure, heaven is a prize, but, even for John, this vision of heaven was only called forth, in his prophetic imagination, after calling to mind his own anguish following the destruction of Jerusalem by Rome. John's image of the city of God was called forth when all hope of establishing the kingdom of God in the earthly realm seemed dashed. John's desire for God's kingdom, God's rule and reign in the earth, and in Jerusalem, was greater than the desire for any extraterrestrial experience.

The idea of heaven, although rooted in prophetic imagination, is not a figment nor a farce. The core proposal is that heaven, the land to be inhabited by the faithful in the eschatological future, is only part of the glory divine into which we have been called. Jesus taught his disciples to pray, "...thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it

is in heaven.” Christians are called to be ambassadors of heaven, living and working, with the aim that heaven, the kingdom of God, is made manifest in the earth. How much richer might the experience of heaven, of salvation, be if persons experienced it in their lifetime? To be saved is to be whole and well, in this world, and in the world to come. The perspective put forth within these pages is not a “prosperity gospel” of the sort propagated in the later part of the twentieth century and in the early part of the twenty-first century. Within these pages is the understanding that to be whole and well is to have access to life’s necessities such as good food, potable water, stable housing, enfranchisement in social, political, and economic spheres, and a general sense of dignity. This understanding of what it means to prosper holds integrity in the United States of America, the Americas, and the world over.

Having witnessed varying levels of poverty in domestic and international contexts, I am sensitive to the plight of those experiencing poverty. Further, I am convicted and convinced by the plumb-line present within Christian scripture; undeniable throughout scripture are the commands and reminders to care for the vulnerable, those persons on the margins of the margins. I am drawn to this writing and research because of my work with persons marginalized by race, ethnicity, disenfranchisement, and disregard.

The first chapter offers insight to the impetus for my personal interest and investment in the work of wholistic salvation. Wholistic ministry is service performed, within church and community, which addresses the physical, spiritual, and emotional needs of individuals. Too often, churches focus on the work of word and corporate worship and there is no remaining resource, in energy nor finance, for ministry which seeks to meet the concrete needs of a suffering humanity. Those congregations which do

participate in acts of wholistic ministry often see them as acts of benevolence or charity. God is concerned with the work of salvation, not only the salvation of souls but the salvation of bodies. Acts of ministry which tend to the nurture of the entirety of the human person are not ancillary to the work of salvation in which we are invited to participate. The work of the sanctuary is as essential as the work of the food bank; social actions are part and parcel of the work of salvation. Salvation, rightly viewed, is wider than the assurance of heaven; salvation is also the assurance of provision on earth.

In the second chapter, the biblical foundation, for the thesis, is presented. Here presented are two pericopes, one from the Hebrew scriptural canon, the second from the New Testament. The scriptures, although divergent in terms of the worlds from which they emerge, have a unity of theme and substance. This unity has to do with God's concern for those who are in need. God cares about the needs of persons who are poor and those who have been made poor; those who are experiencing poverty and those who are without protection due to forces beyond their control are precious to God. God commands that humans, who have the resource to give aid, stand in the breach on behalf of those without resources. In these texts, salvation is a practical matter, salvation from poverty, salvation from danger, and salvation from hunger. In these texts, God shows concern for the whole of human life.

In the third chapter, there is an exploration of the initial years of the period in American history known as the Great Migration. Many African Americans who created a home in the American South, headed north to find and create, for themselves and their families, a better life. They faced unfavorable conditions in their rural and agricultural Southern environs, economic disenfranchisement, racial discrimination, and other abuses

plagued these persons. In response, scores of African Americans courageously uprooted themselves to head north. In the North, African Americans from the American South found themselves as aliens and strangers in foreign lands. The American North was largely urban and industrialized. The ways of being and doing in the harsh environs of the North caught many of the migrants off guard. They were unequipped for employment, disconnected from social connections, inadequately clothed for northern winters, and unprepared for Northern racial tensions. In response, some African American congregations in northern cities began acting as welcome centers and hubs of activity for migrants from the South.

In the fourth chapter, Walter Rauschenbusch is presented. He is the best-known progenitor of the Social Gospel. His conversion was in response to being in community with the congregation to which he was called to serve. Rauschenbusch saw the suffering of his fellow German immigrant folk and was thrust into an internal, intellectual, and spiritual conflict. Throughout his life and ministry, he was taught, and he believed, that the salvation of the soul was the sole reason for Jesus' entrance into the human realm. Faced with the plight of those in his congregation with subpar living conditions, epidemic levels of sickness, death, and economic factors, Rauschenbusch questioned how he understood the nature of God's concern for the whole of human life. Rauschenbusch explored scripture in ways that he had not prior. As a result, he codified a theological framework concerning the kingdom of God being made manifest in the earth "as it is in heaven." In his theological system, human need was conceived as a result of sin. Sin is best understood in Rauschenbusch's framework as selfishness. Rauschenbusch espoused that the church should be the initiator of the kingdom of God. In the kingdom of God, the

needs of all are met in equitable, ethical, and just society. For Rauschenbusch, atonement was accomplished by Jesus's action of solidarity with the marginalized. So, too, it is humanities' mandate to be in solidarity with those tossed about and cast aside as marginal people and communities.

In the fifth chapter, the academic study of social work, and an informative theory for this work of empowering the church and its work in the world, was explored. The church of Jesus Christ, as a religious institution, gave nurture to the field of social work. Meeting needs and engaging communities on the margins of society has always been the work of the church. Social work answers the question, what do we do with those who are in need? Engage them! The theoretical framework of Social Constructivism offers an answer to how to engage persons and communities who have need. The response is to engage with humility and humanity by engaging the community, their voice, and values.

Chapter six contains an exposition of the implementation of the project with the Baptist Pastor's and Minister's Conference of Philadelphia and Vicinity. The results of the project are presented here. Utilized for the research was a quantitative and qualitative hybrid model; surveys and focus groups were used to enrich the data collection. In the end, the hypothesis was supported. The ways in which the hypothesis found support were not, though, the broad sweeping ways expected.

It is my hope that from this research, action, and presentation in this format, each reader will glean the following truth: As God cares for the needs of a struggling and impoverished humanity, humanity, too, must care and provide for the needs of a struggling and impoverished humanity.

CHAPTER ONE

MINISTRY FOCUS

...and he will put the sheep at his right hand and the goats at the left. Then the king will say to those at his right hand, 'Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me.' Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you something to drink? And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothing? And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?' And the king will answer them, 'Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.' (Matthew 25:34-40)

Jesus' work of accomplishing salvation for humanity has often been limited, in understanding, to his work on the cross. Jesus' crucifixion and his emptying of himself of spirit, water, and blood is often touted as the singular instance when Jesus accomplished, or purchased, salvation. What are we then to make of the signs and wonders Jesus performed? What are we to make of Jesus' miracles including when he healed the sick, raised the dead, restored to community those who experienced isolation, fed the hungry, and restored sight to those who could not see? What will we do with this Jesus? The accounts of the writers of the Gospels agree that Jesus was not a docile wallflower, nor was he the type of royalty which demanded to be served. Although he garnered quite a bit of celebrity and notoriety, Jesus attempted to isolate himself from the needs and realities of those who sought to challenge him, sought to touch him, and be touched by

him. What are we to do with this Jesus who “though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness? Being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death—even death on a cross” (Phil. 2:6-8) Jesus often found solitude and refuge in the wilderness in order to be replenished with the strength to continue his very public and accessible ministry. How then do we understand, interpret, and live the life and work of Jesus at a time when gospel preachers and pastors—cloistered behind teams of bodyguards, adjutants and armor bearers—receive praise as defenseless celebrities?

Often, I ponder the question posed in such a pithy way from the pen of Howard Thurman: What does our faith say to men whose backs are against the wall?¹ As one with a compassionate and empathetic heart, I have always felt a burden for people who are considered least, left out and left behind. Growing up in the metropolitan area of St. Louis, Missouri, I can remember the times when driving to church, practices, or rehearsals, there would be a woman or man standing near the street, and occasionally in the streets, asking for alms. I did not always have cash or change to spare, but I always felt a tug at my heart for persons who found themselves, by chance and happenstance, with the streets as their home. I felt the same way when I happened upon an elderly or differently abled person or a person struggling with mental illness. In college, I began to connect the pieces between poverty and systems of oppression and injustice. Not only did I begin to understand how systemic evil played a significant role, in the production and exacerbation of social ills, but I encountered, in conversation, coursework, and printed

¹ Howard Thurman, *Jesus and the Disinherited* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1996), 13.

texts the works of Gustavo Gutiérrez, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Douglas John Hall, and Marcus Borg. After conversing with these texts, peers, and professors, I began to see the connection between the need, which is ever present in our world, and that which is systemic evil. I also learned language and theological construction which gave flesh to the burden which accompanies the grace that disciples of Jesus Christ have so freely received. It was *The Cost of Discipleship* by Dietrich Bonhoeffer which gave insight into the vocation into which the grace of God bids the believer.²

Perhaps, the singular most impactful text during this period was Douglas John Hall's *The Cross in Our Context: Jesus and the Suffering World*. This text provided introduction to the theological precept of Theologia Crucis or the *Theology of the Cross*. It framed, for me, a Christian's vocation to compassion; to suffer with those who are suffering. During the presidential campaign of President Barack Obama, I heard, for the first time, the name James Cone and the idea of Black Liberation Theology. While in college in northeastern Iowa, with its sparse number of Black people and Black churches, I felt an urge to put on an educational panel. The panel took place with sponsorship from my college's religion department and our Black Student Union entitled "Amazing Grace: The Black Church in America." I wanted to educate the majority White Lutheran population on the origins and the particular genius of the Black Church. While in college, especially around the time of the election of the first Black president and the demonization of the Black Church along with Rev. Dr. Jeremiah Wright, I really wanted to learn and invest in my own Blackness. I persuaded the Black Student Union, of which I was co-president, to sponsor a Kwanzaa observance. I purchased every book in the

² Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship* (New York, NY: Touchstone, 1995), 37.

college bookstore of Wartburg College that had something to do with Blackness. I purchased a total of two texts; *Black Like Me* written by John Howard Griffin, a white man who darkened his skin, using medicinal means, to experience Southern life, and *The Souls of Black Folk* by W.E.B. Du Bois.

As a preacher and seminarian, I became even more convinced of the need for the church to be involved in the illumination, resolution and alleviation of social, economic, political, and systemic ills. During a class taught by The Rev. Dr. Damayanthi Niles on soteriology, I began to see salvation as a wholeness and wellness that was not meant only to be experienced in the eschaton. In this moment, I believe that to be “saved,” in addition to any eschatological ramifications, is to be whole and well.

The context in which I carried out my project is the Baptist Pastors’ and Ministers’ Conference of Philadelphia and Vicinity. The conference is comprised of Baptist clergy, most of whom serve in the local church as pastors and associate ministers. The Baptist Pastors’ and Ministers’ Conference of Philadelphia and Vicinity is an organization with a rich history in the city of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. In 2011, two groups committed to the nurture and enrichment of Baptist clergy merged to form the conference. This united conference seeks to promote a high standard of preaching and teaching.³ This is key, as Baptist identity recognizes scripture as an authority in matters of faith and praxis. It is worth noting, though, the conference has an ecumenical appeal and offers participation and membership to persons of many Christian denominations. The communication and interpretation of Biblical precepts is of utmost importance,

³ “Baptist Pastors’ and Ministers’ Conference of Philadelphia and Vicinity Celebrates Five Years of Merger,” program book, 2015.

perhaps more so than in other Mainline Christian Denominations.⁴ In addition to helping its members become better proclaimers by engaging in preaching and lectures on preaching means, modes, and methods, the conference “seeks to promote Christian Fellowship among clergy both male and female who serve in the Delaware Valley. [It seeks] to critically examine the relevant social, political, and economic issues of our day so that our members can be well informed and empowered to make a difference in our communities and beyond.”⁵

The two tributary conferences were the Baptist Ministers’ Conference of Philadelphia and Vicinity and the Missionary Baptist Pastors’ Conference of Philadelphia and Vicinity. Thirteen Baptist ministers founded the Baptist Ministers’ Conference of Philadelphia and Vicinity in 1894. They founded this conference to serve as a “common forum” to discuss the various challenges, social, political, and economic, faced by the people and communities they were called to serve. The numbers of persons in congregations and communities represented in the conference by pastoral representation numbered into the tens of thousands. Thirteen ministers formed the younger conference called the Missionary Baptist Pastors’ Conference of Philadelphia and Vicinity in 1943. These members founded this conference with this purpose: “to provide a peer fellowship for those brethren who pastored small or struggling churches.”⁶

⁴ Jesse T. Williams, *A Remedy for Itching Ears: Christian Doctrine Remixed for A New Generation of Believers* (Apopka, FL: NewBookPublishing.com, 2011), 39.

⁵ “Baptist Pastors’ and Ministers’ Conference of Philadelphia and Vicinity Celebrates Five Years of Merger,” program book, 2015.

⁶ “Baptist Pastors’ and Ministers’ Conference of Philadelphia and Vicinity Celebrates Five Years of Merger,” program book, 2015.

To aptly paint a contextual portrait of the life and the conditions in which the earlier conference was established, one need only turn to W. E. B. Du Bois' groundbreaking work of literary and sociological import, *The Philadelphia Negro*. Published in 1899, a mere five years after the founding of The Baptist Ministers' Conference of Philadelphia and Vicinity. Du Bois' signature sociological work focused on gathering data concerning African Americans living in the city of Philadelphia. Specifically, Du Bois' survey focused on surveying those African Americans living in the seventh ward of Philadelphia. These persons represented the poorest of the poor in Philadelphia. Du Bois' work, in lieu of being replicated in cities around the United States to gather information about the conditions in which poor African Americans suffered, became the representation of all poor communities of African Americans in the country. Du Bois' survey showed, in a manner, which was never more transparent, scientific and systematic, the true nature of the plight of poor Black Philadelphians. This work catalogued social stratification, places of birth, occupation, voting, alcoholism, health, and the interactions of Blacks with persons of other races.⁷ At the time of the founding of the conference, Philadelphia, its seventh ward specifically, received the first wave of the mass migration of Blacks in the United States—the Great Migration.

The Baptist Pastors' and Ministers' Conference of Philadelphia and its tributaries, which no longer exist, have not owned or leased their own space in which to hold meetings. From the inception of the earliest conference to the day of this writing, church buildings volunteered space in which the conference could take up residence. The current place of meeting, or “clubhouse” as it is often called, is the Second Mount Zion Baptist

⁷ W. E. B. Du Bois, *The Philadelphia Negro: A Social Study* (New York, NY: Schocken Books, 1967).

Church. Second Mount Zion Baptist Church is located in the Philadelphia neighborhood called Mantua. Philadelphia is known as a city of neighborhoods.⁸ Mantua, while it is but one neighborhood of many in Philadelphia, is a microcosm of other sectors of Philadelphia where economically disenfranchised Black people live.

Mantua, because it was originally planned to be its own incorporated city, has planned boundaries that one can observe to the day of this writing. Unfortunately, the town of Mantua never came into fruition. However, a vibrant community of persons living within these geographical bounds and taking pride in their neighborhood name arose. Remaining evidence of this legacy of nomenclature exists presently. The current geographical “boundaries” of the Mantua neighborhood include Spring Garden Street on the South, the railroad tracks on the East and North, and 40th Street on the West (31st and Spring Garden to 40th Street to Parrish, Mantua Avenue and 31st Street).

As a result of Mantua’s failure to rise in its intended geographical bounds, a bit north of the area became known as University City. Mantua is in very close proximity to the University of Pennsylvania, Drexel University, and the University of Pennsylvania’s hospital district. This causes demographic data to be blurred with areas of the city affected by past and rapidly accelerating gentrification. The Mantua community suffers from many social ills which reflect the communal contexts in which many ministers of the conference serve.

⁸ “The Quality of Life in Two West Philadelphia Neighborhoods: The Case of Belmont and Mantua,” University of Pennsylvania, accessed November 13, 2017, http://www.archives.upenn.edu/histy/features/upwphil/belmont_mantua.pdf.

Home to several prominent Philadelphians early in the history of the neighborhood,⁹ the neighborhood became home to white working-class people by the late nineteenth century.¹⁰ In the 1920's African Americans migrating from the south moved into Mantua in the first wave of what would become known as the Great Migration. These African Americans from the rural South eagerly sought to find work in the industrialized North. Mantua served as an ideal location due to the close proximity of a nearby railroad, manufacturing, and regular transportation via trolley to Center City in Philadelphia. These migrants found work on the railroad, in factories, in office buildings, and on construction sites.¹¹

In 1940, Mantua was racially mixed at a near fifty-fifty margin, with African American or Black people comprising forty-six percent of the population while the remaining fifty-four percent identified as white. In the 1940's though, Mantua saw a dramatic decline in White residents. In 1950, only a recorded 4,208 people living in Mantua identified as White and by the 1970's Mantua had become overwhelmingly Black.¹² This almost fabled occurrence of White flight, combined with jobs and industry leaving the community, created a perfect storm for the influx of societal ills that typically plagued impoverished communities. Such communities included Black communities

⁹ "Mantua: The Real Estate Promotion that Grew and Grew," UCHS, accessed November 10, 2017, <http://www.uchs.net/Rosenthal/mantua.html>.

¹⁰ Kate Kilpatrick, "In Blighted Mantua, A History of Poverty, Crime and Pride," *Aljazeera America*, January 8, 2014, accessed November 10, 2017, <http://america.aljazeera.com/articles/2014/1/28/obama-philadelphiapromizezonesmantua.html>.

¹¹ Kilpatrick, "In Blighted Mantua," accessed November 10, 2017, <http://america.aljazeera.com/articles/2014/1/28/obama-philadelphiapromizezonesmantua.html>.

¹² "The Quality of Life in Two West Philadelphia Neighborhoods," University of Pennsylvania, accessed November 13, 2017, http://www.archives.upenn.edu/histy/features/upwphil/belmont_mantua.pdf.

where crime, illicit drug sales and abuse, gang activity came as the result of White flight to suburban areas, industry loss, and the loss of household incomes while leading to exodus even of those Black residents who were faring well from the Mantua community.¹³

The year 1968 brought with it a proposed plan for the redevelopment of Mantua. An initiative from President Barack Obama declared Mantua a “promise zone.” One source described the Promise Zone Initiative as, “a partnership between local leaders to leverage federal resources to increase economic activity and opportunity, create jobs, improve education and reduce violent crime.”¹⁴ Persons greeted these plans with a deal of suspicion and for good reason. Urban development, for communities of Black people, especially near valued institutions such as the University of Pennsylvania and Drexel University, meant eviction and repurposing into facilities and populations more suited to the image of the “University City,” which Philadelphia enjoys today.¹⁵

Mantua is a community in West Philadelphia that overlaps thriving centers of commerce, science, medicine and academia in the West Powelton and University City neighborhoods. Mantua is part of a bustling hub in West Philadelphia, geographically speaking, however no tangible proof or evidence exists as to the vibrancy of adjacent areas.¹⁶ Conspicuously, the University of Pennsylvania and Drexel University reside just

¹³ Kilpatrick, “In Blighted Mantua,” accessed November 10, 2017, <http://america.aljazeera.com/articles/2014/1/28/obama-philadelphiapromisezonesmantua.html>.

¹⁴ “Mantua,” UCHS, accessed November 10, 2017, <http://www.uchs.net/Rosenthal/mantua.html>.

¹⁵ Thera Martin Milling, “Baptist Pastors and Ministers Conference of Philadelphia and Vicinity Installs New Officers,” *The Philadelphia Sun*, February 5, 2016, accessed November 1, 2017, <http://www.philasun.com/oasis/the-baptist-pastors-and-ministers-conference-of-philadelphia-and-vicinity-installs-new-officers/>.

over a mile away from Mantua, but nearly a third of adults in Mantua do not have a high school diploma and only a reported four percent had a Bachelor of Arts degree in 2014. In the University City neighborhood, universities and medical centers compensate persons with great sums of money for their scholarly work and or research while the median income for residents of Mantua is less than \$17,000.00, according to American community survey census data. In Mantua, the unemployment rate is near twenty percent. This percentage is double that of the citywide rate of unemployment. It follows naturally that more than fifty percent of the residents of Mantua live below the poverty line. Poverty often has negative consequences on the ability to learn. This is further illustrated in that only twenty-seven percent of students in grade eight scored “proficient” or above in math and thirty-six percent “proficient” or above in reading.¹⁷

Within this space, The Baptist Pastor’s and Ministers’ Conference of Philadelphia and Vicinity meet regularly. This space is the context in which many of its members serve. While Philadelphia seems to be finding its place as a commuter city for persons who live and work in New York City, the conditions for persons living and working in Philadelphia, particularly in impoverished communities of Black persons, continue to decline with rampant gentrification and endless building projects.

In 2014, after sensing God’s call on my life and preaching an initial or “trial” sermon, the New Sunny Mount Missionary Baptist Church in St. Louis, Missouri gave me license to preach the gospel. This moment came after those who raised me did so in a

¹⁶ “Emlenton to Mantua: The Life of Everly's Estate After His Death,” Bryn Mawr College, accessed November 10, 2017, <http://www.brynmawr.edu/cities/archx/05-600/proj/p1/jcac/emlentenlater.html>.

¹⁷ Kilpatrick, “In Blighted Mantua,” accessed November 10, 2017, <http://america.aljazeera.com/articles/2014/1/28/obama-philadelphiapromizezonesmantua.html>.

small St. Louis County municipality, called Beverly Hills, in a home which was filled with faith and love. I learned to love God and neighbor as myself. Those responsible for me brought me up in the church, and more specifically, on the laps of the women who comprised the Mothers' Board. I learned what it meant to love God, to love worship, and to be in awe of holy things, in the atmosphere of corporate worship among models of kindness and generosity. I also believe that God placed within me a love and empathy for people. The church, and family, wisdom of my elders, and the school of lived experience nurtured this love and empathy. In St. Louis, we commonly observed persons in need along the streets begging for alms. Seeing abject poverty, homelessness, and mental illness cultivated within me a desire to do something to alleviate, if not eliminate, the suffering of those whom misfortune, as I understood, marginalized. As a child, I envisioned the far-fetched possibility of reclaiming one of the deserted industrial warehouses in the city as a place to service the needs of people who found themselves living on the streets as sojourners (Joel 2:28). This facility, I imagined, would offer much more than "a hot and a cot." It would offer job training, physical and mental health services, partnerships with employers in the region, and housing that allowed for more dignity than the shelters which existed. I conceived this idea as a place of charity, as I did not yet have the vocabulary to see this as offering anything more than merely a social service.

While in seminary, I took a summer class with the topic of soteriology that shook and reformed my notions of what salvation was and how it might look, feel, and taste. Part of the model of Eden Theological Seminary, which I did not know when I enrolled, is to expose a theological embeddedness and allow one to reform their theological

perspectives with building blocks, some old and some new, of one's own intentional choosing. Had I known then that theological education at Eden would rock my world, I may not have enrolled, and therefore missed great insights because of a fear of the unknown. Theological Education promotes critical inquiry of theological orthodoxy and orthopraxy. I had to wrestle with the concept of salvation as more than a spiritual condition that would be realized at the point of death and in the eschaton. I struggled, and at some moments outright fought, the notion of salvation as being able to be realized in this life as well as the next. However, this augmented understanding of the very eminent reality of salvation allows me to understand my ideas about service provision to those who are thought of least as more than charity or a good social service. I could see this type of work as the work of the church and an effort to make salvation a reality for persons in in their living as well as in their dying. For me, the understanding of shalom is much more than peace. Understanding shalom as wholeness and wellness and not merely as a peace that is an absence of war was an eye-opening proposition.¹⁸

During a visit to Christ the King United Church of Christ, prior to my becoming Student Pastor there, The Rev. Traci Blackmon shared that not only the body of persons called Christ the King, but the community surrounding the church informed her understanding and Modus Operandi about who the church is, what the church needs, and should be doing. This conception of the sphere of influence and responsibility echoed and affirmed my sense that the church was called to be active and engaged in community in ways that are really and truly beneficial to community. This list includes the residents of

¹⁸ Erland Waltner, "Shalom and Wholeness," *Brethren Life and Thought* 29, no. 3 (1984): 145-151, accessed December 16, 2017, ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials, EBSCOhost.

local housing, students in local schools, and those whose work and or activities bring them into their realm.

For a time, I served as a volunteer with the St. Louis Public School District's faith-based initiative. As part of this program, I served in a community elementary and middle school, as a mentor meeting regularly with students to offer homework help, a positive influence, and most importantly, a listening ear. While at the elementary school to which I was assigned, I learned that the zip code in which this school functioned had the highest rate of homelessness in the North St. Louis area. This meant that at one, or multiple, points in the school year, a student may be homeless and out of school for a period of time. In this place, I learned the reality of the school to prison pipeline; persons used third grade reading scores to determine how many new beds the prison system will need in the future. While working in this elementary school, I saw young boys being enticed, and in some cases, bullied into delivering and selling illicit drugs. In the case of the elementary school I was privileged to serve, I bore first-hand witness to the ways in which systemic evil conspires to trap persons and communities even before they have a fighting chance at a modicum of success.

I also had opportunity to serve as mentor in a middle school in the St. Louis Public School District. I met, weekly, with two young men, relatively unscathed by the systemic evils that gambled on their failure, who I thought were on track to make it. After a while, due to a move of one of the boys, it was just me and one student meeting one on one, we developed a bond. I learned that he lived in a two-parent household with his brother. I learned that his father was an entrepreneur, owning an automotive repair shop. I learned that he spent summers working at his father's shop, while making a little money

to keep in his pocket. This child was set up for success, had he been born with another color of skin or lived in the communities outside of St. Louis city, perhaps evil would not have had the opportunity to touch him. His brother and some friends were walking to the corner store, to get candy, when a shooter opened fire in their direction. My mentee's friends ran away but, his brother, caught in the gunfire, was killed. This was ruled as a random act of violence by the St. Louis Metropolitan Police Department. Being out of town on a school trip to the Civil Rights Museum in Memphis, Tennessee served as the only reason for the sparing of my mentee. I have seen the ravages of injustice on an individual's entire being— mind, soul, and body. I believe the church can play a role in addressing the deficit.

Individuals cannot hear the gospel over rumbling stomachs, the extreme cold of winter, or without adequate clothes and provisions. People cannot hear the gospel over rampant gentrification which removes people from their homes. People cannot hear the gospel of Jesus Christ over distressed minds, and naked bodies. Hearing the liberating and life-giving gospel of Jesus proves difficult when political powers, which one does not fully comprehend, conspire against your children's lives. Hearing the gospel of Jesus Christ over the weeping and wailing that comes after a bullet or addiction takes some mother's child's life proves difficult.

What does our faith say to the masses of women, men, boys, and girls whose backs are against the wall?¹⁹ What do our churches say to those whose backs are against the wall? Does our Christian faith and practice meet the needs of those for whom Jesus

¹⁹ Thurman, *Jesus and the Disinherited*, 13.

would have us to care? Would our communities notice or care if our local assemblies due to influence, whim, or circumstance closed our doors and relocated or ceased to exist?

In *The Cross in Our Context: Jesus and The Suffering World*, Douglas John Hall stands as an apologist for the theology of the cross as a concept that is faithful to the witness of scripture. Hall writes, “The theology of the cross aims in its soteriological reflection to take with great seriousness the human condition from which salvation is needed.”²⁰ The city of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania bears the distinction of being the poorer of the largest cities in the United States of America. One can observe near Rittenhouse Square, a Philadelphia neighborhood which many millionaires call home, persons in abject poverty on the sidewalks begging alms from those who pass by. The condition with which a great portion of persons in Philadelphia deal each day is apparent. Presently, Philadelphia neighborhoods once home to Black urban poor and working poor are experiencing rapid gentrification which has forced people who have called these neighborhoods home to seek shelter elsewhere. Philadelphia needs salvation from conditions such as food insecurity, the lack of economic opportunity, and political disenfranchisement.

I understand salvation as a wholistic endeavor in which the church of Jesus Christ must participate with all the religious fervor and zeal with which we attend to our spiritual condition. The Baptist Pastors’ and Ministers’ Conference of Philadelphia traces its origins to a group founded with the intention of discussing the social, political, and economic needs and realities of the people within the congregations and communities they served at the advent of the initial wave of the Great Migration. At this juncture, the

²⁰ Douglas John Hall, *The Cross in our Context: Jesus and the Suffering World* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2003), 127.

conference focuses more on enriching the life of the church and pastors by providing opportunities for fellowship, preaching, and the discussion of preaching. A named emphasis of the conference hearkens back to the desires of the founders of the earlier conference to have a forum to dialogue about the issues facing the communities that they serve.

Philadelphia is a city that has great need and, as a result, many social organizations and religious congregations are already involved in the work of bringing about a wholistic vision of salvation for their communities. Their foci and methods may differ as it relates to social justice, advocacy, political engagement, food provision, utility assistance or any number of other avenues. While recognizing that many churches already suffer from a shortage of resources, I am of the mind that every local church that claims to embrace and proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ can and should be doing something to minister to the needs of humanity. Every church cannot do everything, but every church can do something to participate in the work of making salvation a lived reality. In his book, *Discipleship for African American Christians: A Journey through the Church Covenant*, William Turner asserts the following concerning evangelism and modeling the faith Christians profess. Turner wrote, “Evangelical ministry requires us to demonstrate that the same Jesus who died for our sins is a savior who is filled with compassion.”²¹ What is this gospel ministry if it does not proclaim, in real and tangible ways, “good news to the poor, recovery of sight to the blind and freedom for the bound and oppressed” (Luke 4:18).

²¹ William C. Turner, *Discipleship for African American Christians: A Journey Through the Church Covenant* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 2002), 58.

What does the faith that we as ministers of the gospel, as pastors, as community leaders, say to the masses of people whose backs are against the wall?²² As a Christian, compelled by the gospel of Jesus Christ, I would like to know in which ways these pastors tend to the temporal needs, the most neglected portion of the salvation narrative.

The Baptist Pastors' and Ministers' Conference of Philadelphia and Vicinity will provide a good pool of clergy serving urban churches in disenfranchised communities. Doing a survey of churches connected with the conference is a way to get a baseline on the nature of the ministry being done by members of the conference; and it is a way to hold clergy accountable, by holding up a mirror which reflects not merely the best and most desirable image a ministry might recall of itself, but a restatement of those collected responses.

The gospel of Jesus Christ and the salvation which he provides is seen, yes, in his completed work on the cross. The work of salvation cannot only be witnessed in the death and resurrection of Jesus, but also in his life and ministry. The miracles of Jesus give witness to salvation in ways not always considered by churches, often coined as traditional, without an orientation to a social ministry. This notion of traditional churches abstaining, by intention or by happenstance, from the whole of the corpus of the ministry of Jesus Christ, I would argue, is a misnomer. Local congregations who refuse to engage in ministries of healing, wholeness, and empowerment in social, political, economic, as well as spiritual fronts is an incomplete practice of the gospel of Jesus Christ and a poor representation of the incarnation. In Jesus, God came near to a fallen and broken humanity. Jesus lived his life in the world, addressing the conditions of the world, and

²² Thurman, *Jesus and the Disinherited*, 13.

redeeming humanity in time and in eternity. A report by the World Council of Churches Commission on World Mission and Evangelism, conveys the following sentiments:

Jesus affirmed that with him the time of salvation had begun. For example, he said, “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand” (Mark 1:15). Jesus not only taught the good news but also healed people, and these healings were visible signs that the kingdom of God was “at hand.” When Jesus turned to the sick, the poor, the outcast and the marginalized, people saw and experienced the kingdom of God as a present reality. Healing was not only a central feature of Jesus’ ministry but also something in which he wanted his disciples to participate. He asked his followers to continue his work and endowed them with the authority to do so. The missionary instruction in each of the first three (synoptic) gospels connects the proclamation of the word of God with deeds, and explicitly mentions the healing ministry, for example: He (Jesus) called to him the twelve disciples and gave them authority over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal every disease and every infirmity ... These twelve Jesus sent out, charging them ... “Preach as you go, saying, ‘The kingdom of God is at hand.’ Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, cast out demons” (Matt 10:1,5,7).²³

Clergy who are committed to the work of ministry, opportunities for fellowship, and opportunities to increase their learning concerning the practical and theoretical portions of pastoral ministry fill the Baptist Pastors’ and Ministers’ Conference of Philadelphia and Vicinity. In this project, I intend to discover, through surveys, focus groups, and other effective means: Does the Baptist Pastors’ and Ministers’ Conference of Philadelphia and Vicinity take just as seriously the portion of their stated mission to “critically examine the relevant social, political, and economic issues of [their] day so that [their] members can be well informed and make a difference in [their] communities and beyond?” Further, I intend to discover whether ministries which spring from such goals, are implemented in the local churches served by clergy members of the conference and in which forms such ministry has taken shape. I intend to do this with a critical,

²³ World Council of Churches, Commission on World Mission and Evangelism, “Witnessing to Christ Today: Promoting Health and Wholeness for All,” *International Review of Mission* 101, no. 394 (2012): 132-152, accessed December 16, 2017, ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials, EBSCOhost.

realistic, and benevolent eye. I desire to be critical in examination via surveys and interviews; the data is the data. I desire to also be realistic in the analysis of the data and benevolent in the presentation of both data and analysis. I believe that while not every church can fulfill every physical need which may be present in community, every church can take part in some aspect of a ministry which is incarnational. In the apt words of James Cone, “the gospel proclaims that God is with us now, actively fighting the forces which make man captive. And it is the task of theology and the church to know where God is at work so we can join him in this fight against evil.”²⁴ It is my belief that many of the congregations represented in the Baptist Pastors’ and Ministers’ Conference of Philadelphia and Vicinity are, in some way, participating in the wholistic salvation and wellness of their congregations and communities to the end of social, political and/or economic betterment.

²⁴ James H. Cone, *Black Theology and Black Power* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2008), 39.

CHAPTER TWO

BIBLICAL FOUNDATIONS

God cares deeply about the plight of God's people. God cares about the plight of the whole of creation. Concerning the creation of earth creatures, God cares especially about human wellbeing and sustenance. God claimed the ragtag band of Israelites to bless and favor. As a biblical foundation for work concerning the church ministering to the needs of persons in community, it is fitting to elevate this passage of Hebrew scripture to speak about God's command concerning God's people, the vulnerable, and their needs. The passage selected for exegesis is Deuteronomy 10:14-19. In this pericope, we find Moses conveying God's imperative and even preferential concern for the wellbeing and welfare of the vulnerable.

It is noteworthy to mention that there are many Bible scholars who, have and would, examine this passage with the inclusion of the two verses preceding it and the three verses which follow. Recognition and respect belong to the inclusion of those verses in the general study, exegesis, and examination of this passage. Indeed, Deuteronomy 10:12-22 serves as a literary whole which further serves to connect the instruction to Israel in verses fourteen through nineteen in the context of divine law. The approach and expanse of this exegetical work differs slightly, because of the desire to focus on the core of the command and its implications for the people which God claimed for God's self. The preceding and following words which set the pericope in context

deserve treatment and will be reviewed in a general manner in the following words of introduction. To subdivide, or pare one piece of this literary whole, without some examination of the trimmed pieces, would be to do injustice to this exegetical work.

This instruction to tend to the wellbeing of the vulnerable is delivered as a sermon oration along with God's delivery of the second set of tablets, on which God inscribed the Ten Commandments to Moses. In Deuteronomy 10:12-13, we see, in the delivery of the imperative to care for the wellbeing of the vulnerable, that it is greater than any other moral imperative which God, Moses, or any subsequent prophets would deliver to Israel. The imperative delivered in this passage comes in the context of the divine law. Deuteronomy 10:12b echoes the words of the second half of the Shema, the essential Jewish creedal statement. This statement ends with the giving of law which is at the core of all Jewish law: "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might" (Deut. 6:5).

This comes as a mandate to God's chosen people, not as a suggestion or moral lesson. This comes to Israel as law from the mouth of Moses, and by proxy, from the mouth of God. God is concerned with the total, or wholistic, wellbeing of the vulnerable among the people identified as God's chosen people, Israel. God also cares about the wellbeing of the stranger, foreigner, or sojourner.

Deuteronomy 10:14-19

To the LORD your God belong the heavens, even the highest heavens, the earth and everything in it. Yet the LORD set his affection on your ancestors and loved them, and he chose you, their descendants, above all the nations—as it is today. Circumcise your hearts, therefore, and do not be stiff-necked any longer. For the LORD your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great God, mighty and awesome, who shows no partiality and accepts no bribes. He defends

the cause of the fatherless and the widow, and loves the foreigner residing among you, giving them food and clothing. And you are to love those who are foreigners, for you yourselves were foreigners in Egypt (Deut. 10:14-19).

The first task which will help to parse and exegete this pericope is to examine the organization of this text. To aid in that exercise, the text will be subdivided into acts, like a play. Indeed, this text portrays a grand drama which is to be rehearsed again and by all persons whom God claims as God's own. For the purpose of thorough examination, the text, while brief, has been separated into three sections or acts which will give exegetical insights into the text, the people, and the God who called both into being and becoming.

In the first act, there is a rehearsal of sorts in which God reminds Israel of God's greatness and of Israel's chosen-ness. A rehearsal is simply a recounting. It can be a recounting of objective items such as money, goods, and services. A rehearsal can also be a subjective recounting or retelling of memory or experience. In verses fourteen and fifteen, we see God's rehearsal and claim of sovereignty over the heavens, the earth, and all that is within the earth. Included in this rehearsal is God's reminder to Israel that they alone were chosen to be the object of God's favor and affection in the world. They were chosen among all the peoples of the earth to be the recipients of God's affection because of God's relationship with their ancestors.

Due to their chosen-ness and God's sovereignty over the earth, God issues a command to Israel. God commands Israel to circumcise the foreskin of their hearts and to no longer be stiff-necked. The God of the universe has a special relationship with this people, going back to their ancestors and a special covenantal relationship between them and God. This covenant was marked by the sign of circumcising the foreskin of male genitals. Here, God calls for circumcision yet again, but for circumcision of a peculiar

sort; God calls for a circumcision not of the flesh, but of the heart. We gain further insight into this command by the latter portion of this command, as God commands Israel to be stiff-necked no longer. This gives insight into what may have been the condition of Israel: stiff-necked and with hearts which were not circumcised or open to God.

“Circumcise” (מִיל) appears forty times in the Old Testament. The word “circumcise” carries with it a linguistic semantic range and a figurative understanding which could prove helpful in understanding the meaning of the circumcision of the heart in this pericope.¹ The range of definitions of “circumcise” focus around a few phrases or understandings. To circumcise, in some instances, is to literally remove foreskin of the genitals, particularly male, an example of this understanding is found in Genesis 17:11. A second understanding is to cut off. An example of this usage is found in Psalm 118, when the Psalmist speaks of warring enemy nations and their advances: “All nations surrounded me; in the name of the Lord I cut them off! They surrounded me on every side; in the name of the Lord I cut them off! They surrounded me like bees; they blazed like fire of thorns; in the name of the Lord I cut them off!” (Ps. 118:10-12). A third understanding of “circumcise” is to cut down. This is best exemplified in the words of Psalm fifty concerning vengeance sought by the psalmist on his enemies: “Let them vanish like the water that runs away, like grass let them be trodden down and wither” (Ps. 58:7). Lamentations chapter three contains a usage of “circumcise” which is more akin to the figurative understanding in Hebrew; to destroy: “Pay them back for their deeds O Lord according to the work of their hands! Give them anguish of heart; your curse be on them! Pursue them in anger and destroy them from under the Lord’s

¹ F. Brown et al., *Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin, 1906), 557.

heavens” (Lam. 3:64-66). The understanding most helpful in our pericope is yet another figurative understanding of the same Hebrew root. To circumcise, especially when mentioning one’s heart, one’s mind, one’s eyes, etc., is to open. A use of this Hebrew root which illustrates this understanding is found in Jeremiah chapter four. Once again, we see the example of the circumcision of the heart being elevated, even in Jeremiah, because it seems that God’s people Israel have repeatedly hardened their hearts, which manifests itself in the ways in which they, God’s chosen, do not model God’s generosity nor obedience to God’s law.

If you return, O Israel, says the Lord, if you return to me, if you remove your abominations from my presence, and do not waver, and if you swear, “As the Lord lives!” in truth, in justice, and in uprightness, then the nations shall be blessed by him, and by him they shall boast. For thus says the Lord to the people of Judah and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem; Break up your fallow ground, and do not sow among thorns. Circumcise yourselves to the Lord, remove the foreskin of your hearts. (Jer. 4:1-4)

In act two of this grand drama, God offers Israel God’s reasoning for issuing this new command. God offers the reasoning and justification in this way, that God alone is God and that God is not partial and takes no bribe. The God who is chief God and the Lord of all lords, and who has selected the people Israel to be favored among all the other peoples of the earth, says to her that God is not partial nor does God take bribes, and that God is not swayed. Justice and righteousness are essential to God’s nature and character.

In the Hebrew language and understanding, *mishpat* (מִשְׁפָּט), which is translated in Deuteronomy 10:18 as “justice,” has a range of usages and understandings.² The exploration of those understandings is vital to understanding this text. The Hebrew word

² F. Brown, S. R. Driver, and C. A. Briggs, *The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon: With an Appendix Containing the Biblical Aramaic* (Boston, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, Inc., 2008), 1048.

translated as “justice” appears 421 times in the Old Testament. The semantic range of this Hebrew word is narrow. This root may accurately be translated as the following: judgement, justice, ordinance, statute, righteous judgement. A text which clarifies “justice” in the appointed text is found in Leviticus chapter nineteen: “You shall not render an unjust judgment; you shall not be partial to the poor or defer to the great: with justice you shall judge your neighbor” (Lev. 19:15). Deuteronomy 10:18 best lends itself to the understanding of righteous judgement on behalf of the vulnerable. God simply asks that Israel model God’s behavior as they are coming into their promise. This behavior includes justice, toward vulnerable and or societally marginalized persons, in addition to any affection, compassion, charity, or equitable and just representation in court.

Act three offers reminders to Israel. Reminders are prominent in the Book of Deuteronomy. There are reminders and rehearsals of the goodness of God, the sovereignty of God, and the favored status of the people Israel throughout this text. Deuteronomy 10:19 comports with the established pattern of reminders and rehearsals of the goodness of God to and among God’s chosen people Israel. God instructs Israel to mind, care for, and even love the stranger. God’s reminder to them is that they were foreigners and strangers in Egypt. It is noteworthy to mention that before the Israelites were enslaved in Egypt, they sought refuge and provision in that foreign land and were recipients of great hospitality and generosity, largely because of Jacob-Israel’s son, Joseph. The Israelites were reminded to model God’s benevolence with those who are vulnerable.

The word translated as “stranger” in Deuteronomy 10:18 is, in the Hebrew, *ger* (גֵּר).³ This Hebrew root appears in the Old Testament ninety-two times. The range of English translations of this root are fairly narrow. The Hebrew word is often translated as “alien,” “stranger,” “foreigner,” or “sojourner.” “Sojourner” is the best translation and understanding in this instance because it speaks not only to the foreign status of the persons, but also to a protected legal status. Thus, the stranger is not to be regarded as an unwanted interloper but as a guest. A sojourner was to be given rights, perhaps not to inheritance nor to land. These rights were rights of protection granting passers-through a legal status, though these persons may have been undocumented, which prohibits Israel from mistreating them in the street and in court.⁴

Through the mouth of Moses, God speaks first to remind Israel of the command that God gave in chapters prior. God reminds Israel that God, and God alone, is to be at the forefront of their priorities and affections. The greatest commandment preceded by the Shema in Deuteronomy chapter six is reiterated in Deuteronomy chapter ten.

In verses fourteen and fifteen, God reminds Israel of their chosenness by pointing out that God is indeed God, not an idol which can be moved and subject to human manipulation. God, here, illustrates to Israel that God, and God alone, is the supreme sovereign of the universe. Everything including the heavens and the highest heavens are under the dominion of God’s rule and reign. How awesome then it must be that the supreme deity has chosen a ragtag band like Israel to make promises to them and to keep

³ Brown, Driver, and Briggs, *The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon*, 158.

⁴ Leviticus chapter nineteen contains, in the midst of codes for holiness and hospitality, rules for the treatment of the “Sojourner.” “When an alien resides with you in your land, you shall not oppress the alien. The alien who resides with you shall be to you as the citizen among you; you shall love the alien as yourself, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt: I am the Lord your God” (Lev. 19:33-34).

them. God reminds Israel that God has all things under God's own control, but God has decided to love them, exalt them, and make them prosper.

God commands God's beloved, God's chosen, to circumcise their hearts and not be stiff-necked or stubborn. As an alternative to being stubborn in their hearts, God offers God's self as an exemplar of the ways in which God would have Israel to exist in the world, especially as Israel encounters those who are vulnerable. It is as if God is reminding Israel that not long ago, they were in a vulnerable situation existentially. God found them and came to their rescue. It is as if God sought to remind Israel to model God in everything because they were prone to forget how God delivered them. Perhaps, God sought to nudge them not to forget the situation and circumstances in which God found them when God delivers them into the fullness of the promise God made to their patriarch Abraham. To circumcise one's heart is an interesting command, seeming as though the sign and symbol of Abraham's covenant with God was his cutting of foreskin, and a shedding of that blood as a symbol of keeping the covenant. This action had become ritual and routine in the life of Israel and was a sign on the body of males that a covenantal relationship is enacted. Here, God tells Israel to give not only the substance of their flesh in covenantal relationship, but their minds and affections as well.

This exegetical work would not be complete without an analysis of the literary and historical contexts which envelope this pericope. The following words will attempt to address the relevant contextual pieces in a comprehensive manner. Deuteronomy is the fifth book of the Torah. While its authorship is traditionally attributed to Moses, some scholars find this doubtful. Terence Fretheim asserts the following about the composition of Deuteronomy:

Regarding the origin and formation of Deuteronomy there is both agreement and dispute. Substantial agreement is evident in linking (a form of) Deuteronomy with a law book that 2 Kings 22-23 reports was found in the Temple during a reform in the reign of Josiah (640-609 BCE)...Although scholars agree that Deuteronomy developed over a considerable period of time, less consensus exists regarding the details.⁵

Fretheim's scholarship supposes that the writing of Deuteronomy is a compendium of complementary works by authors who were immensely concerned about the life of Israel and the Mosaic tradition. In terms of content, Moses is presented as holding forth in the Book of Deuteronomy in one, if not a series of sermons to Israel. Walter Brueggemann posits that the Book of Deuteronomy is comprised of a series of three extended speeches of Moses'.⁶ It is helpful to liken them unto sermons as they are reminders to Israel of their journey toward the land of promise which God covenanted with their forefather Abraham. These sermons are more than mere speeches also because their focus is theological and pastoral. Israel is being exhorted to remember the goodness and miraculous works that God has done in their midst. They are also exhorted to trust, revere, and obey God with their entire being.

Further, Brueggemann posits that chapters six through eleven comprise Moses' second oration. Brueggemann says, "Chapters 6-11 are a series of almost homiletical appeals whereby "Moses" reviews YHWH's goodness and generosity toward Israel and urges Israel to adhere to the commands of Sinai and to Israel's proper identity as YHWH's chosen people."⁷ Deuteronomy 10:12 offers further insight into this rehearsal

⁵ Terence Fretheim, *Deuteronomy* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1996), 154.

⁶ Walter Brueggemann, *Introduction to the Old Testament: The Canon and Christian Tradition* (London, UK: Westminster John Knox, 2003), 86.

⁷ Brueggemann, *Introduction to the Old Testament*, 87.

of the goodness of God and exhortation to godly living with a rehearsal of the Shema.

Moses exhorts the Israelites in the following verses to model God's kindness and charity with the most vulnerable as a means of living into the life of a people chosen by God.

Deuteronomy 10:14-19 makes a profound claim on the lives of people who claim to belong to God. A sovereign God chose Israel, a vulnerable people, to bless and to favor. Above all the other people groups of the earth, the pericope posits that God chose Israel. Since God chose Israel, Israel is then to model the generous behavior of the one who chose them. God expects that the people God chose will model God's generosity particularly with the other vulnerable populations of the earth. Specified in this pericope are the widows, the orphans, and the sojourner.

New Testament Exegesis

We move now to a second exegetical work which will provide a complete biblical foundation for the doctoral project and thesis. The gospel according to Luke is attributed to Luke, commonly called a physician. Luke seeks to make an orderly account for Theophilus concerning Jesus, his teaching, and his work. It is important to note that none of what Luke has reported and compiled was known to Luke or experienced first-hand. This volume was assembled by means of interviews and the like. This is an important point to raise because unlike the writers of the other synoptics, Matthew and Mark, and unlike John, Luke's author's aim is simply to report and not to convince. This is not to say that Luke's gospel is not persuasive or biased; however, Luke's aim is as an objective observer who may or may not have believed.

According to the tradition of the church, Luke was a physician who was also a traveling companion of the apostle Paul. Luke writes in a systematic fashion about the life of Jesus from infancy, circumcision, preparation for public ministry, Jesus' ministry in Galilee, and then onward to his ascent to Jerusalem. This is where Jesus is located in the pericope being exegeted in this chapter. Luke chapter ten finds Jesus still being, in a sense, adjudicated by the crowds and religious authorities to examine his levels of religious orthodoxy, theological fidelity, and political loyalty. As one can imagine, Jesus conquers these examinations in ways and through means which confounded his examiners. Chapter ten begins with Luke's reporting of Jesus sending out seventy persons to go out and work ahead of him; to go into the village where Jesus would travel to cultivate the vineyard. Jesus gave these seventy the instructions to go and live among the people and be subject to their hospitality, or lack thereof, heal those who were infirm, and proclaim the coming of the kingdom of God.

Whenever you enter a town and its people welcome you, eat what is set before you; cure the sick who are there, and say to them, "The kingdom of God has come near to you." But whenever you enter a town and they do not welcome you, go out into its streets and say, "Even the dust of your town that clings to our feet, we wipe off in protest against you. Yet know this: the kingdom of God has come near." (Lk. 10:8-11)

The matter of the kingdom of God is a matter which confounds; the kingdom of God is about reversal of the status quo and a reordering of religious priorities. The kingdom of God is about truing up theological orientation away from the, service to and maintenance of, religious institutions to the movement of liberation, foretold through the mouth of the prophet Isaiah and reiterated through the mouth of Jesus. Luke records Jesus' reading of the prophetic text in this way: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the

captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor" (Luke 4:18-19). It is in this spirit that Jesus receives the Pharisee in Luke 10:25. This same boldness and prophetic creativity cultivates the parable of an unlikely neighbor.

Luke 10:25-37

Just then a lawyer stood up to test Jesus. "Teacher," he said, "what must I do to inherit eternal life?" He said to him, "What is written in the law? What do you read there?" He answered, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself." And he said to him, "You have given the right answer; do this, and you will live." But wanting to justify himself, he asked Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?" Jesus replied, "A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell into the hands of robbers, who stripped him, beat him, and went away, leaving him half dead. Now by chance a priest was going down that road; and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side." So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. But a Samaritan while traveling came near him; and when he saw him, he was moved with pity. He went to him and bandaged his wounds, having poured oil and wine on them. Then he put him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him. The next day he took out two denarii, gave them to the innkeeper, and said, "Take care of him; and when I come back, I will repay you whatever more you spend." Which of these three, do you think, was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers?" He said, "The one who showed him mercy." Jesus said to him, "Go and do likewise" (Lk. 10:25-37).

To provide a detailed reading of this pericope, this text has been further divided into movements like a grand symphonic work or oratorio. Indeed, this pericope is laden with dialogue, interplay, surface understandings, communal understandings, and linguistic nuance which are only apparent in a close exegetical reading. This section will be enhanced with word studies which will further probe and offer challenge to understandings of this pericope.

Movement I 10:25-29

I.I 25, Challenge

In the initial section of the first movement, a lawyer comes to Jesus to offer a challenge. He asked the question about what it is that he must do to inherit eternal life. On its face, this interchange can be read as adversarial, and it is. This lawyer, one well studied in religious law, particularly Mosaic law, arose from out of the company surrounding Jesus with the intention of tempting, testing, and even trapping Jesus in a question about orthodoxy. The lawyer asked Jesus about eternal life and the means of inheriting it. It is peculiar that this lawyer would ask Jesus this question because as an expert in Mosaic law, the lawyer already knows the answer to the question he has put to Jesus, as it is recorded in the fifth book of Moses. The lawyer also was familiar with the laws Moses issued concerning “neighbors” in Leviticus. It appears that the only deficit of knowledge which the lawyer would have possessed is the knowledge of Jesus’ response.

I.II 26-28, Responses

In this section we find Jesus’ response along with a response from the lawyer. Jesus, perhaps knowing that the lawyer was trying to trick him, responded to the question with a question of his own. Jesus transformed this trap into a teachable moment about the kingdom of God. A reading of this question which is closer to the Greek text might read, “How do you understand it?” The lawyer then falls into a trap into which people with a great amount of self-righteousness and pride fall. The lawyer answered his own question, perhaps because he wanted to illustrate his own knowledge. The lawyer lifts, appropriately so, the great commandment given in Deuteronomy 6:5: “You shall love the

Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might.” The lawyer also lifts a text from Mosaic law in Leviticus concerning neighbors and sojourners: “...you shall love your neighbor as yourself...” (Lev. 19:18). Jesus, after hearing the lawyer’s response, Jesus responds by giving praise to the lawyer for the accurate and orthodox answering of his own question. Jesus further exhorted the lawyer to live out the commandment.

I.III, Further Challenge

Here, the lawyer, perhaps upset that he had been outwitted by Jesus, offers yet another quandary which he is sure will reveal Jesus’ radical and unorthodox beliefs and teachings. The lawyer asks Jesus to clarify the identity of the one who is called “neighbor.” Further at the heart of this question is “to whom do I have responsibility?”

Movement II 10:30-35

II.I 30, Preposition

At the top of this movement, Luke paints Jesus as not having missed a beat. Jesus begins this parable about an unlikely neighbor with a fantastic setup to draw the lawyer and likely bystander into the whole hyperbole.⁸ The scene that Jesus paints is of a man who was journeying from Jerusalem to Jericho, and there he was attacked by a band of robbers, or plunderers who take property by force. This band of robbers beat this traveler

⁸ There is some debate among scholars about whether this story comes from the mouth of Jesus or if it was put forth by Luke as a means to convey new understanding which was present in Christian communities about what it means to be a neighbor. Joshua Marshall Strahan, “Jesus Teaches Theological Interpretation of the Law: Reading the Good Samaritan in Its Literary Context,” *Journal of Theological Interpretation* 10, no. 1 (Spring 2016): 71–86, <https://search-ebscohost-com.utsdayton.idm.oclc.org/login.aspx?direct=true&db=rft&AN=ATLAn3878927&site=ehost-live>.

and stripped him of his clothing. To add insult to injury, Jesus says, the robbers injured the traveler to the point that he was hanging precariously close to death. It is important to note that this man is not named, assigned a social status, or assigned any ethnic and or religious belonging. This is to drive home that the identity of the one who is vulnerable and in need of aid is to be qualified, not by their familial relation, religious affiliation, status, or loyalties, but because they are in need.

II.II 31-33, Responses

Jesus introduces three characters to the scenario to further this narrative. The first potential protagonist introduced is a priest. The priest walked along the road and saw the man crumpled there, beaten, naked, and lying on the ground. Jesus says that the priest walked past. In this same vein, a Levite walked along the Jericho road. The Levite, as the priest before him, passed by the man who was left beaten and bloodied by the violence of robbers. The priest and Levite, being religious professionals, might have been leery of offering aid to the man whom they happened upon, because they feared that he might be dead. The codes regarding the cleanliness of temple folk, especially priests, must have also been a consideration in the minds of the priest and the Levite in the parable, as well as in the mind of the lawyer who has issued this challenge to Jesus. Numbers 19:11 and Leviticus 21:10-11 contain statutes which might have applied to this instance regarding the handling of a dead body: “Those who touch the dead body of any human being shall be unclean seven days” (Num. 19:11); “The priest who is exalted above his fellows, on whose head the anointing oil has been poured and who has been consecrated to wear the vestments, shall not dishevel his hair, nor tear his vestments. He shall not go where there

is a dead body; he shall not defile himself even for his father or mother” (Lev. 21:10-11).

While holiness and purity codes may have prevented the religious professionals from giving aid to this man lying in the road, the Samaritan, perhaps unbound or un-adherent to these particular codes about ritual cleanliness, gave attention to this man and was moved with compassion.

In the Greek, the word translated as “see” is *harao* (ὁράω).⁹ This word appears in the third person imperfect tense. This verb in its base translation means to stare at. The Greek root appears 459 times in the New Testament. The range of meaning associated with this verb is fairly narrow in scope. One understanding of the Greek verb translated as “see” is to see with the eyes. Moreover, to “see” can be translated, in experiential terms divergent from the plain understanding having to do with the eyes, as perceiving, knowing, heeding, to become acquainted with. The declension which is found in Luke chapter ten is *ιδὼν*, which appears sixty-one times in the New Testament. Each time it is translated as “having seen.”

Also noted in this section is the compassion of the Samaritan man as he sees and encounters this beaten man on the Jericho road. The word translated as “compassion” in this pericope is the Greek word *splagchnizomai* (σπλαγχνίζομαι).¹⁰ This verb appears twelve times in three distinct forms in the New Testament. The Greek root is often understood in the following way: to be moved. In the ancient biblical world, the seat of emotion was thought to be the bowels or the gut. It was believed that the emotions of love

⁹ Geoffrey W. Bromiley, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament: Abridged in One Volume* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1985), 706.

¹⁰ Sakae Kubo, *A Reader's Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 1971), 64.

and pity emanated from the bowels.¹¹ What this conveys, even the more, is a sense that compassion comes from deep within an individual's being, in an almost visceral way. This is to the end that an individual is moving to not feeling alone but doing. It is action to which the Samaritan man is moved. The Levite and priest might have felt a sense of sorrow, concern, or even despair over the man in the road; however, one's "neighborliness" is apparently not judged by the emotions one feels toward one who is in need. Jesus seems to be after an actionable response.

II.III 34-35, Radical Hospitality from an Unlikely Character

The Samaritan, moved with compassion, rendered first aid to the unidentified victim in the road. With the oil, wine, and cloth present with him, the Samaritan man cared for his wounds. He expended his personal resources to help a stranger in distress and need. In a further act of selfless generosity, the Samaritan man put the wounded stranger on the back of his beast and took him to an inn. In this inn, the Samaritan stayed with him and gave aid. When the time came for the Samaritan to go on his way, he left the wounded stranger at the inn. The Samaritan also left instructions with the innkeeper to care for the needs of the wounded stranger and he would return to compensate the innkeeper for whatever amount was expended on behalf of the wounded stranger.

The stranger was a recipient of the radical generosity and extravagant hospitality of the Samaritan man on three occasions: on the road, in the inn, and following his departure. This repetition of the generosity of the Samaritan is given by Jesus to

¹¹ Even today, people associate emotional reactions and responses with sensations they associate with the stomach. People often describe feeling butterflies in their stomach when they are nervous, anxious, or in love. Others use the expression that their stomach is "tied in knots" when describing their nerves or anxiety.

emphasize the action of the Samaritan. This would have rung out in the ears of the hearers of this parable because the Samaritans were a despised demographic among the Jews. As Jesus emphasizes the generosity of this man of despised ethnicity, it is unvoiced, yet clear that the Levite and the priest gave nothing. They neither spared time nor attention for the wounded stranger laying along the Jericho road.

Movement III 10:36-37

III.I 10:36, Challenge

Here, Jesus confronts the lawyer who challenged him in the first section. Jesus asked the lawyer, in the company of those gathered, about the neighborliness exemplified by the three men described in his narrative. Which of those three men exhibited the behavior befitting a neighbor?

When Jesus uses the term “neighbor,” he means something radically different from what the lawyer, tradition, and Mosaic law meant; Jesus is radical and revolutionary. In his use of the word “neighbor” here, Jesus is doing what he is known to do: challenging and redefining traditional understandings to the end that the hearer will catch a glimpse and understanding of the kingdom of God.

The Greek word translated as “neighbor” is *plesion* (πλησίον).¹² The Greek noun translated as “neighbor” carries with it a literal meaning of one who is near. Figuratively, this term could be used to mean a friend or, really, any other person. This contrasts with the Hebrew cultural and religious understanding that one’s neighbor was restricted to one whose ethnicity and religiosity were common with your own. Seventeen times in the New

¹² William D. Mounce, *The Analytical Lexicon to the Greek New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1993), 378.

Testament, *πλησίον* (neighbor) appears. In the clear majority of those instances, the translation appears as ‘neighbor’ rather than describing one whose physical location was neighboring or in close proximity; i.e. “So he [Jesus] came to a Samaritan city called Sychar, near the plot of ground that Jacob had given to his son Joseph” (Jn. 4:5).

III.II 10:37, Responses

Two responses are issued here: the first response comes from the mouth of the lawyer and the second from the mouth of Jesus. The lawyer, in response to Jesus’ question, answers in an expected way. After hearing about the callousness displayed by the temple folk and the liberal charity rendered by the Samaritan, he had to admit that the Samaritan had been a good neighbor. Jesus, upon hearing the correct response from the lawyer, instructed him to behave in a like fashion.

The two pericopes selected and exegeted within these pages, Deuteronomy 10:14-19 and Luke 10:25-37, agree on two points. The supremacy and sovereignty of God is a concept illuminated within both texts. Perhaps this assertion is made more apparent in the Old Testament text. In the Deuteronomy chapter ten pericope, Moses rehearses the supremacy of God in his sermon to the Children of Israel. The Deuteronomistic writer placed these words in the mouth of Moses:

So now, O Israel, what does the Lord your God require of you? Only to fear the Lord your God, to walk in all his ways, to love him, to serve the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, and to keep the commandments of the Lord your God and his decrees that I am commanding you today, for your own well-being. Although heaven and the heaven of heavens belong to the Lord your God, the earth with all that is in it, yet the Lord set his heart in love on your ancestors alone and chose you, their descendants after them, out of all the peoples, as it is today (Deut. 10:12-15).

The elements within that section which highlight the supremacy of God are multiple; three will be named in this document. God's supremacy is illustrated in the statements that the "heavens, and the heavens of heavens," which is to say, the splendor-full canvas and vault in which God's glory is displayed and resides, and the terrestrial realm upon which mortals dwell, are God's creations and under God's dominion. The second proof to the supremacy and sovereignty of God in the Deuteronomy chapter ten pericope comes in a different spirit than the aforementioned. Moses makes mention of God's sovereign claim over Israel because of the condition in which God found them, loved them, and preserved them. Finally, God has statutory requirements on the body politic: honor and reverence to God, behavior patterned after God, love and service to God. Similarly, the Luke chapter ten pericope also rehearses the sovereignty and supremacy of God in the lawyer's recitation of "the greatest commandment:" "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself" (Lk 10:27).

The texts also agree that God is concerned with the wellbeing of those who are vulnerable. In Deuteronomy, God makes clear God's request that Israel model God's generosity with vulnerable populations, namely widows, orphans, and sojourners. In Luke, Jesus emphasizes the tenor and tone of this command with the telling of the parable commonly called "The Good Samaritan." God seems to have an affinity, a special love, for populations and peoples which are vulnerable. To be vulnerable is to be susceptible to harm. God cares for those populations who, in the case of Luke's gospel, have been beaten by brute robbers and left wounded; and in Deuteronomy, for those who are disenfranchised of power and economy.

These texts, separately and together, illustrate that God is both sovereign and concerned with the needs of vulnerable humanity. What comfort it is to know that the God of the universe, the God whose celestial creation proclaims the awe-full nature of a sovereign God, and whose creation, across the vast geography and span of earth, puts forth wisdom and knowledge, is concerned about the welfare of humanity: “The heavens are telling the glory of God; and the firmament proclaims his handiwork. Day to day pours forth speech, and night to night declares knowledge. There is no speech, nor are there words, their voice is not heard; yet their voice goes out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world” (Ps. 19:1-4). The image of God gleaned from these texts should bring joy to all who are marginalized, because a concerned Creator is in total control, on their side, and regards their marginalization and disenfranchisement.

The pericopes exegeted within these pages puts forth, also, a sobering reflection concerning a flawed and fallen humanity before a perfect and lofty God. Within the selected Deuteronomy chapter ten pericope and the Luke chapter ten pericope are both similar and unique illustrations of the forgetful, insular, and self-righteous ways in which humans approach a holy God and receive God’s blessing.

Humans are forgetful; it is the nature of humanity, if our actions and processes are not full of care, to repeat past sins and neglect past victories. In the Deuteronomy chapter ten pericope, God, through the personage of Moses, must remind Israel of the way God found them—small, vulnerable, and in obscurity—and God chose to make of them a great nation and to bless them; first their ancestor Abraham, and then all his offspring. It was because of God’s favor and promise to their fore parents that they were preserved and multiplied in captivity in Egypt. It was the favor of God and a result of God’s

promise to Abraham that they were delivered from bondage in Egypt. Through water and desert, God preserved them with manna, quail, and fountains of water which sprang forth out of rocks. Israel tended to forget the goodness of God to them, even though God's miraculous and supernatural acts should have been seared in their individual and communal memories. Moses reminds them of the works God wrought for them and among them, because Israel, like the whole of humanity, tended to forget its struggle and deliverance in times of good, peace, and prosperity.

Humans are also insular and selfish; these two traits could be discussed individually, but for the sake of this work they will be discussed as a unit. In Deuteronomy chapter ten, Moses made clear God's desire that Israel would open their hearts and not be so stubborn. This is because God was concerned with the wellbeing of the vulnerable populations—widows, orphans, and sojourners—and Israel was not concerned as God was concerned. It appears from the textual witness that God was concerned with vulnerable populations, and they forgot that they too were a vulnerable people. It was God who, by nothing but compassion, kept them through their sojourn in Egypt. In Luke chapter ten, the lawyer who comes to Jesus has an understanding of who his neighbor is and is not. This understanding of what it means to be a neighbor and who qualifies is upended by Jesus. The parameters for familial and communal relationality, within the Kingdom of God, are different than insular traditions and isolationist norms.

The Luke chapter ten text brilliantly illustrates the ways in which humans, even those who claim to abide by moral codes and or religious ethics, behave self-righteously. Even in the face of God, humans tend to haughtily flaunt their knowledge of the rules and regulations to the letter. It is unfortunate that so often humanity, like the lawyer in Luke

chapter ten, the twelve who walked with Jesus, and the religious establishments of Jesus' day and today, fail to grasp the spirit of the law of God. In Luke chapter ten, the lawyer appears to be so concerned with flaunting his knowledge of the law in the face of Jesus, that he has missed the understanding of what the Kingdom of God is really like. The lawyer would have, without a doubt, been familiar with the Deuteronomy chapter ten pericope in which Moses issues God's command to Israel to care for the vulnerable and the sojourner, and yet, his understanding of neighbor is limited to those whose blood and creed he shares. In God, humans are made righteous. The metric, the plumb line, for that which is righteous and that which is wicked, is held and measured by the sovereign God of the universe. In God is the righteousness, not in the merely religious recitations of humanity.

To be God's people is to yield oneself, communally and individually, to the will of the sovereign God of the universe. To be God's people is to be obedient to God's commandments and to recall the goodness of almighty God. To be God's people is to care about and imitate the benevolent nature of God by caring for the poor and impoverished. To be God's people is to have a preferential option for those who are on the margins of society and even toward the margins of the margins. This includes the orphans, children without the nurture and protection of parents; widows, women who, within a patriarchal society, are without the protections of a husband; and sojourners, strangers, travelers, and resident aliens who abide in a foreign land without the protections of citizenship. To be God's people is to choose joyful adherence to a covenant of care and concern. To be God's people is to refuse to manipulate and malign the grace of God into an offering of covenant for which the human parties are delinquent.

To be the people of God is to yield completely to God's desires, and to model God's generosity with those who cannot help themselves, those who are vulnerable, those who are in need.

These texts apart and together make a unified claim about God's mission in the world. In the Deuteronomy chapter ten text, God shows up as a benevolent sovereign, caring for those considered the least and those who are left behind. Humankind is invited, commanded even, to participate in God's mission in the world by mimicking God's generosity. It is all too easy to people of a familiar stripe; the familiarity, be it ethnicity, cultural orientation, social status, political affiliation, creedal affirmations, etc., should not determine, from the perspective of the kingdom which God is establishing, who benefits from our generosity. In addition, this generosity is not a frivolous flaunting of wealth or resources, but part of a strategic plan to support those who need support the most. Walter Brueggemann makes excellent remarks to this end. He says,

What was YHWH's initiatory commitment to Israel is now to become Israel's derivative commitment to the stranger. Israel's attachment to YHWH is to be enacted as an attachment to the vulnerable in society. Covenant with YHWH always pushes one outside safe religion to the work of human community...the [Israelite] tradition had already insisted that the "resident alien" should be treated like and Israelite. Israel is not permitted to be a homogeneous, ethnic community turned in on itself, but is mandated, as a part of its most elemental responsibility, to reach beyond itself to those who do not quite belong.¹³

The lawyer, in Luke chapter ten, should have already known that the intention of the law was not inwardly focused. However, it is the proclivity of humankind to substitute human desire and comfort with the will of God.

God's desire, for Israel to work and strive toward the total wellbeing of socially and economically vulnerable peoples, is evident in the genius of God's command to treat

¹³ Brueggemann, *Deuteronomy*, 131.

the stranger not as an alien, but as a resident alien or sojourner who is given rights. Israel knew, all too well, what happens when aliens seeking refuge from war or, due to lack of provisions in a season of famine, are not given protections by the nation in which they are guests. The result of such vulnerability leads to slavery. Brueggemann adds clarity to his reasoning and the requirement for foreigners to be given rights while they are residing in strange lands. Brueggemann posits, “The motivation for this ethical requirement in verse 19b...is that Israel’s own point of struggle, as vulnerable outsiders in Egypt. We are accustomed to think of Israelites as slaves. It is important, however, to remember that their status as slaves was an economic development from the vulnerable status as aliens and outsiders, because unprotected sojourners are almost certain to become economic slaves.”¹⁴ Further, Brueggemann writes, “The summons here is to protect strangers economically, precisely so that they do not end up as slaves, as did Israel. Israel’s own Exodus memory is that YHWH—the one who executes justice for the vulnerable—came among them in Egypt and gave them a new life they could not secure for themselves.”¹⁵

This is the task of wholistic ministry: an imperfect and delivered people, modeling God’s benevolence to and with vulnerable peoples. This is to happen on a global scale, yes; but what of the “neighbors” and strangers we encounter every day? They, too, are worthy of God’s love, protection, and provision, and that of community which claims the God of Exodus and unlikely neighbors as their own. Perhaps, human participation in this divine work is an integral means through which God is reconciling the world to God’s self.

¹⁴ Brueggemann, *Deuteronomy*, 131.

¹⁵ Brueggemann, *Deuteronomy*, 131-132.

CHAPTER THREE

HISTORICAL FOUNDATIONS

African Americans living in the American South wanted opportunity. In large part, the opportunity they sought was not about self-aggrandizement or some inflated sense of worth. Their quest was to really and truly become citizens of the United States of America and enjoy the opportunities present in this land, which caused their suffering. The idea of citizenship, for Blacks living in the American South and their desire for citizenship, did not merely find their roots in a notion of legal standing within the state. They sought personhood, and that which the words or sentiments of the Declaration of Independence suggests, inalienable rights to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness, so enshrined in this nation's founding documents. Blacks in the American South were only a few years divorced from the abolition of slavery and the three-fifths compromise. Prevailing thought and will, as well as the constitution of the United States of America, sanctioned these dehumanizing institutions. Their freedom and entitlement to live as free persons, as opposed to property or possessions or sub-human beings, grounded the quest of Blacks in the American South to get others to really and truly see Blacks and for Blacks to experience life as citizens. Citizenship in the United States of America, for Black Americans, is fraught by a dubious heritage. As enslaved persons, persons of the African diaspora were, at one point, not considered human, and at a later point,

considered three-fifths of a human being for the sake of the weight of their owners' voting power.

Following emancipation, people of the African diaspora living in America enjoyed certain rights and privileges associated with both humanity and citizenship. Following this period, both humanity and citizenship were called into question. The question about the citizenship, rights, and humanity of Black Americans is still up for debate for some in the legislature and law enforcement.

A hymn reads, "I'm pressing on the upward way, new heights I'm gaining every day, no higher place that I have found, Lord plant my feet on higher ground. My heart has no desire to stay, where doubts arise and fears dismay. Though some may dwell where those abound, my prayer, my aim, is higher ground. Lord, lift me up and let me stand, By faith, on Heaven's table land. A higher plane than I have found; Lord, plant my feet on higher ground."¹

In the years following the abolition of slavery and the period called "Reconstruction," Southern Blacks saw and experienced retaliation against their new-found personhood. This happened as a result of Southern Whites' attempt to "redeem," what they perceived as, a soiled Southern social order from the empowering forces of emancipation and reconstruction.² This retaliation took the forms of perpetuated institutional racism, lynching, Black codes and Jim Crow laws. These cruel and inhumane practices stemmed from Whites in the American South fearing a loss of power

¹ Johnson Oatman Jr., "Higher Ground," in *The New National Baptist Hymnal*, ed. R. H. Boyd (Nashville, TN: National Baptist Publishing Board, 1977), 222.

² Deidre Helen Crumbley, *Saved and Sanctified: The Rise of a Storefront Church in Great Migration Philadelphia* (Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 2012), 27.

and control. The extreme grab for social and political power and control evidenced this fear. Southern Whites' enactment of "redistricting and imposing poll taxes, literacy tests, and property criterion for voting" best shows this seizure.³ An absurd quest to maintain an economy that profited Southern Whites also triggered this brutality. Southern Whites regained control of a free and or cheap labor force by passing vagrancy laws, creating sharecropping agreements, and using the labor of prisoners.⁴

Passed in 1865, Mississippi and South Carolina enacted the first Black codes. They would become a model for the rest of the American South. These states enacted these laws with the aim of keeping Southern Blacks, those formerly enslaved and their children, entrenched in low-wage agricultural labor on plantations. They wrote these laws to keep Southern Blacks in their "place" as cogs in the wheel of a Southern economy that thrived on their free labor. For example, in South Carolina; a law prohibited Blacks from holding any occupation other than farmer or servant unless they paid an annual tax of \$10 to \$100. This provision hit free Blacks already living in Charleston and former slave artisans especially hard. In both states, Blacks were given heavy penalties for vagrancy, including forced plantation labor in some cases. These codes not only limited the economy and ingenuity of Southern Blacks, but also their movement.

To say that there was little improvement in the relations between Southern Blacks and Southern Whites would be to drastically understate the truth. In truth, the relations between Southern Blacks and Southern Whites devolved. With extrajudicial, and sometimes sanctioned, murders called lynchings, White terrorist organizations like the

³ Crumbley, *Saved and Sanctified*, 35.

⁴ It should be noted that the prisoners who provided this labor were disproportionately Black. We have the later part of the thirteenth amendment to thank for the loophole in slave labor.

Klu Klux Klan, along with diminished prospects for economic and social advancement, drove Southern Blacks to seek a way upward from the southern cesspit of subjugation and tyranny. Southern Blacks simply grew tired of being vulnerable and even expendable pawns at the altar of White supremacy, the Southern economy, and White fragility. This brings to mind the scripture that reads, “And God spoke to Israel in a vision at night and said, ‘Jacob! Jacob!’ ‘Here I am,’ he replied. ‘I am God, the God of your father,’ he said. ‘Do not be afraid to go...for I will make you into a great nation there’” (Gen. 46: 2-3, NIV).

The Great Migration was a period in U.S. history between 1910 and 1970. During this period, African Americans living in the rural South sojourned to the urban North. Many African Americans journeyed North because they expected that the treatment that they experienced in terms of racism, bigotry, and discrimination would dissipate once they moved north. They thought of the lands north and west of the Mason-Dixon Line as a promised land. In a sense rural Southern Blacks sought refuge from the famine of justice in the North in a similar way that the Israelites sojourned to Egypt in search for provisions. Between 1910 and 1920, the Black populations of major U.S. cities increased markedly. In the decade between 1910 and 1920, the Black population of major northern cities grew by large percentages, including New York (sixty-six percent), Chicago (148 percent), Philadelphia (500 percent) and Detroit (611 percent).

The Great Migration was a vast and leaderless movement which was more about making transition from one region than to another.⁵ The Great Migration is the title of the mass exodus of Black people from the southern United States to the higher ground of the

⁵ Isabel Wilkerson, *The Warmth of Other Suns: The Epic Story of America's Great Migration* (New York, NY: Random House, 2010), 9.

free North and to the West. Out of the Carolinas, Virginia, Georgia, Florida, Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana, and Texas, Black people ventured to lands unknown. Yes, many ventured out seeking opportunity, however the opportunity they sought was rarely really about fortune or fame. Southern Blacks sought the opportunity to, in the words of the great work of poetry which graces the Statue of Liberty, breathe free. The great poem, penned by American poet Emma Lazarus, “The New Colossus” was penned as a means to give the Statue of Liberty meaning. The portion of the poem which graces the base has resonance not only with the European migrant fleeing tyranny but also with African Americans in the South who had been made tired by the agricultural and domestic labor to which many were relegated and impoverished by generations of slavery. A proverbial and often literal strangle hold was on the necks of Southern Blacks, restricting their movements, actions, potential, education, professional endeavors, etc. The oppression of the South, though familiar, was never comfortable. Southern Blacks often tested the bounds of the written and unwritten rules of engagement which provided shape to their White counterparts’ ways of being and doing in society.

In *The Warmth of Other Suns: The Epic Story of America’s Great Migration*, Elizabeth Wilkerson, calls to the historical witness the story of a fellow named George Swanson Starling and the reasoning surrounding his harrowing journey north on a twenty-three-hour journey from Florida in a Jim Crow rail car. Wilkerson records:

The train rumbled past the forest of citrus trees that he climbed since he was a boy and that he had tried to wrestle some dignity out of and, for a time, had. They could have their trees. He wasn’t going to lose his life over them. He had come close enough as it was...George was paying the price for tormenting the ruling class that owned the citrus groves. There was no place in the Jim Crow South for a colored starling like him.⁶

⁶ Wilkerson, *The Warmth of Other Suns*, 5-6.

This narrative collected by Wilkerson does not name in any detail the crime, infraction, faux pas, or foible of which George Wilkerson was guilty. It only recounts that he made the “ruling class” upset. Folks twice kissed by God’s sun fled from these nonsensical and temperamental rules, regulations, and restrictions. They fled to unfamiliar environments similarly to George Swanson Starling who also fled without knowing what he would do once he arrived, what his life would be, nor when he could send for his loved ones. This narrative is only the base of the mountain of narratives of individuals and families who fled the South in fear and in search for life, liberty and the freedom to pursue their own happiness.

In addition to their own bodies, and varying amounts of possessions, these Southern migrants brought with them faith. They brought with them varying degrees of faith in God and, at least, faith in the church. For the migrant, in the North, the church was the center of community, and a means to connection, resource, and community. Some Black Churches ministered unto this need, and because of their ministry, lives were sustained and enriched.

The following pages briefly survey the Great Migration, its causes, and its costs. A discussion on the environments of great migration cities, including general information as well as the particulars that attracted these migrants, follows. Further this work discovers religious institutions that not only benefited from but sought to benefit Southern migrants and their work. Then, the focus of this work will turn to Philadelphia, Pennsylvania and its life as a Great Migration city, and the impact of its religious community by surveying the ground-breaking anthropological work of W.E.B. Du Bois’, *The Philadelphia Negro*. This work concludes with the advent of the Baptist Ministers’

Conference of Philadelphia and Vicinity as a means to discuss and address the concerns facing Blacks in Philadelphia.

Not only was the migration to the north a merely organic one, Northern periodicals and communications from persons migrating to the north also instigated the movement. The gospel concerning the north proved true for some and too good to be true for others. Publications like the *Chicago Defender* played a key role in encouraging the northern migration of Southern Blacks. Of the 250,000 weekly papers distributed, at its height of popularity, persons delivered a majority of these papers to the South.⁷ The defender in addition to generating positive propaganda for the northward movement of Southern Blacks served as a clarion voice for racial justice in Chicago.⁸

In Malaika Adero's book, *Up South: Stories, Studies, and Letters of This Century's Black Migrations*, she compiled various letters and articles chronicling the journeys, longings, and desperation of some Southern Blacks to get north of the Mason-Dixon line. These letters include the curiosity and desire of the Black Southerner to move north, bolstered by the *Chicago Defender*. The excerpt below gives insight as to the Black Southerner's hope in, and reliance on, the Defender and its message.

I take [read] the Defender and I think it is the only paper in this whole world. I used to take plenty of Southern Papers, but now give me the defender. For my sake and for the sake of others, please put it in the paper explaining to the nuts that the train that's taking members of the race from the South is not carrying them away to starve and freeze. But I have been talking to some of them and they say that just as soon as the train hits old Pensacola, they are gone. But these prejudices are telling us that we better study ourselves and stay away from the North send a nickel that we will be glad enough to get back here if we can make

⁷ William A. Darity Jr., ed., s.v. "Chicago Defender," *International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences*, 2nd ed., accessed August 9, 2018, http://link.galegroup.com/apps/doc/CX3045300313/UHIC?u=upenn_main&sid=UHIC&xid=83d797a4.

⁸ Darity Jr., s.v. "Chicago Defender," accessed August 9, 2018, http://link.galegroup.com/apps/doc/CX3045300313/UHIC?u=upenn_main&sid=UHIC&xid=83d797a4.

the money to get back with. Try to give the nuts and understanding in the paper if you all can.⁹

The church, particularly the Black Church, involved itself in the migration of Black people to the great Northern metropolises in many ways. Large and notable churches like Mother Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church in Philadelphia, Abyssinian Baptist Church in New York, and Olivet Baptist Church in Chicago served as welcome centers for migrants. Southern Blacks came to the North and found environs were not always as hospitable and welcoming as they heard and expected. The migrants were familiar with the church and sought out the church to be a space of warmth, refuge, and aid.

Churches in the North benefited greatly from the migration from the South. Their congregations grew rapidly to modern megachurch proportions with memberships numbering in the thousands. Churches created auxiliary committees, affinity groups, staff ministers, and multiple worship experiences to accommodate the increased number of congregants in worship.¹⁰ Olivet Baptist Church in Chicago was a superb example of congregations flourishing during the migration. Olivet grew to the point that it had “...forty-two departments and auxiliaries, 512 officers, twenty-three salaried workers, a congregation of 8,743 members, a Sunday school enrollment of 3,100, two buildings, and five assistant pastors.

Rev. Lacy Kirk Williams served as the pastor of Olivet Baptist church in Chicago for many years. Williams was born in Alabama and moved with his parents, Levi and

⁹ Malaika Adero, *Up South: Stories, Studies, and Letters of This Centuries Black Migrations* (New York, NY: The New Press, 1993), 53.

¹⁰ Albert J. Raboteau, *Canaan Land: A Religious History of African Americans* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1999), 85.

Elizabeth Williams, to Texas.¹¹ In his adult years, he served congregations in Marshall and Fort Worth, Texas.¹² Following his service to Baptist congregations in Texas, in 1916 Williams moved north to begin a pastorate at the Olivet Baptist Church of Chicago. Williams served Olivet as pastor for the remainder of his life; in 1940, Williams died in a plane crash.¹³

Dr. Williams came to Olivet as one with a proven track record of ecclesial leadership and his coming provided a source of hope to those in within the Olivet Church and the wider community. Dr. Williams was a pastor, a skilled orator, administrator and a builder of houses of worship. The last building project he led in Texas was of the Mount Gilead Baptist church, Fort Worth; this building was constructed to the sum of \$90,000.00.¹⁴ Williams also served in various leadership capacities within Baptist state organizations. Namely, he served as president of the Baptist Missionary and Educational Convention of Texas for twelve years. Persons hoped that his coming would be a unifying factor for Baptist's in Chicago, with emphasis on the relations of Black Baptist churches and Olivet's relationship with White Baptists in the city. Members of the Olivet Church believed that, "Doctor Williams could keep the Olivet machine oiled and that he had inventive genius to add more parts to the machine..."¹⁵ Two paragraphs have been

¹¹ "Lacey Kirk Williams," *The Journal of Negro History* 26, no. 1 (1941): 136-37, accessed July 10, 2018, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2715065>.

¹² "Lacey Kirk Williams," 136-37, accessed July 10, 2018, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2715065>.

¹³ J. Gordon Melton, *Religious Leaders of America*, 2nd ed. (Detroit, MI: Gale, 1999), accessed July 10, 2018, http://proxy.library.upenn.edu:2084/apps/doc/K1627501240/BIC?u=upenn_main&sid=BIC&xid=e2e14b8.

¹⁴ Miles Mark Fisher, "The History of the Olivet Baptist Church of Chicago" (MA diss., University of Chicago, 1922).

¹⁵ Fisher, "The History of the Olivet Baptist Church of Chicago."

dedicated to the life and person of The Rev. Lacy Kirk Williams D. D., a former pastor of the Olivet Baptist Church in Chicago. This has been done to express the monumental importance of the pastoral leader and personality in the life of the Black Church. This also has been written to illustrate the experiences which may have contributed to Williams' success as Pastor of the Olivet Church and as leader of its outreach programs to Black migrants.

Williams' Concern for the Migrating Negro

Lacy Kirk Williams concerned himself greatly with the plight of the Blacks migrating from the rural South. In the Chicago Sunday Tribune, Williams composed a treatise to reflect on the conditions of those who had become his congregants, his neighbors, and their adjustment to life in the urban North and the adjustment that Blacks from the rural South made in regard to religious life and religious community. Concerning the entry of Black migrants from the rural South, Williams remarked that their migration was not an anomaly in and of itself. He possessed awareness and understanding of the contributing factors that led Southern Blacks to move northward; factors tied specifically to their racial identity.

Today, as in recent years, the American population is drifting from the rural districts to the cities. This movement has been so marked and rapid that now a majority of our total population is urban. Statistics show that black people in this matter have been no exception. In 1870 there were about 75,000 Negroes living in cities; in 1900 2,000,000; and now it is estimated that quite 5,000,000 or one-half of the entire race, live in cities. The same things that have caused white persons to move to the cities have likewise influenced Negroes. But Negroes have some special reasons for their cityward drift. Among these are A desire for new, better environments and living conditions; a desire for justice and better police

protection; a desire for the best educational advantages, wider industrial opportunities and better wages and improved religious opportunities.¹⁶

Williams also understood that Blacks emigrating from the rural South had certain expectations about what would be their experience in the North. These expectations concerned the church, the people, and wider society that would greet them in the northern frontier. In large part, Southern migrants were ignorant, at best, and misinformed, at worst, concerning the nature of life in the North.

Williams addressed these in his article:

These new migrants do not find in the cities what they anticipated, but instead they find new, difficult, depressing problems they are not prepared to solve. They soon discover strenuous economic and complex social conditions. During the slow and tedious process of assimilation they sometimes lose the hope and inspiration that led them to town. Just so the newcomers find marked differences in matters of church and religion. In their former rural homes these people maintained a simple, not too costly form of church life. They were constant and faithful church supporters because there were less diversions and fewer organizations bidding for their time and patronage. In most cases they were well known in the communities from which they came. Their contacts were close and they enjoyed the honors and bore the burdens of church leadership.¹⁷

To address the, sometimes grave, condition of Black migrants, Olivet commissioned one of the first trained Black Social Workers in America, S. Mattie Fisher and Mrs. Jessie Mapp, to survey community needs. The survey included the names of all adults in the home, church affiliation, length of time in the city, “experience as Christian workers in their home churches,” profession, and information concerning children. They made a total of over five thousand home visits to complete their survey of community. As a result of their work, a kindergarten and a support group for mothers of enrolled children was

¹⁶ Milton Sernett, *African American Religious History: A Documentary Witness* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1999), 372.

¹⁷ Sernett, *African American Religious History*, 372-373.

initiated. A “girls guild,” designed to meet social, practical, and religious concerns of girls was instated, as well as a “children’s church” to both train and engage children in the worship of God from their level of understanding. In addition to the work of tending to the needs of mothers and children, visitation of the infirm, downtrodden and “shut in” were tended to as well. In the words of S. Mattie Fisher, the Olivet church “grew from a church to a religious center before our very eyes.”¹⁸

In 1899, a wealthy White woman sponsored the work of a young Black sociologist W.E.B. Du Bois. His work included a commission to survey the condition of Black people in Philadelphia. His survey encompassed the seventh ward of Philadelphia. Du Bois conducted this survey by going door to door within the seventh ward asking questions about social, economic concerns, health, job prospects, family life, religious participation, and Black interaction with Whites in Philadelphia. Perhaps most peculiar in this survey was Du Bois’ way of gathering information and building trust within this community. He rented a property within the ward and took up residence for a period of time. Du Bois’ work is relevant to this work particularly because of the time of his research and publication. He conducted the research for *The Philadelphia Negro* during a primary wave of Southern Black migration to Philadelphia. This work gives a vivid picture of Blacks in Philadelphia, some of which would be Southern migrants, and the ways in which others received them and their adaptation to the new Northern urban landscape and experience.

Du Bois begins his work with a statement of the problem to which his assessment might yield illumination. He called this the Negro problem. Perhaps he means only to

¹⁸ Sernett, *African American Religious History*, 368-371.

suggest that this is the problem that is pertinent to the “Negro” in Philadelphia. Or does he mean to suggest that the “Negro” his or herself is the problematic element? Du Bois’ own words give light to his meaning. In his collection of essays, *The Souls of Black Folk*, Du Bois opens the conversation with the following words. He wrote, “Between me and the other world there is an ever-unasked question: unasked by some through feelings of delicacy; by others through the difficulty of rightly framing it...to the real question, how does it feel to be a problem? I seldom answer a word.” With that, it seems that Du Bois spoke to the duality of the problematic nature of having Black skin in Philadelphia and the issues facing individuals with Black skin. Among the issues Du Bois identifies concerning Black people in Philadelphia, he names the inability to be inconspicuous as primary. He wrote that, in Philadelphia, as elsewhere in the United States, persons with Black skin are unable to be inconspicuous.

According to *The Philadelphia Negro*, the years 1870-1896 were filled with movement from freed Southern Blacks to Philadelphia. “Untrained and poorly educated countrymen, rushing from the hovels of the country or the cottages of country towns, suddenly into the new, strange life of a great city to mingle with 25,000 of their race already there.” Dubois said of them.¹⁹ With their migration the problematic element of their integration into the fabric of Philadelphia had not only to do with their skin, twice kissed by God’s sun, but with their education experience and cultural peculiarities.²⁰

The church, Dubois finds, functions as a center of community. He says of the Black Church in the North; “... rise of a church organization among Negroes was a

¹⁹ W. E. B. Du Bois, *The Philadelphia Negro: A Social Study* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania, 1996), 25-45.

²⁰ Du Bois, *The Philadelphia Negro*, 25-45.

curious phenomenon. The church really represented all that was left of African tribal life and was the sole expression of the organized efforts of the slaves. It was natural that any movement among freedmen should centre about their religious life, the sole remaining element of their former tribal system.”²¹ Dubois, noted that the church, Baptist, Presbyterian, Episcopalian, African Methodist Episcopal, grew in this time and was a stabilizing force. In these organizations, Blacks found communal structure, practiced cooperative economic engagement in the purchasing of church property and the compensation of clergy, and participated in social and entertainment programs. It was the structure of the church, which was often mirrored in lodges and fraternities, secret and public, which were used to provide social engagements and entertainments, as well as more tangible benefits such as funds for internment.

The Church and more specifically the Black Church was instrumental in the provision of stabilizing resources, tangible and intangible, for Black migrants from the American South. Lacy Kirk Williams posited a solution to this issue of the Black Church being unequipped:

City Churches must in the future make better preparations for these new recruits, must know the religious psychology of these newcomers. They must have the proper social and religious mind or spirit, the mind and the spirit of Christ, and must possess more of the giving rather than the getting nature and spirit. They need a more comprehensive program, better qualified workers, plants adequately equipped for recreation, Christian education and the social needs of the community and for worship. As it is now, most of our churches are suitable only for paying, praying, and preaching.²²

²¹ Du Bois, *The Philadelphia Negro*, 197-234.

²² Sernett, *African American Religious History*, 374-375.

Southern migrants were not equipped to face the environs of the urban industrialized North. The agricultural and agriculturally adjacent jobs to which society restricted Blacks in the American South did not have much value in the north. In the Northern states, although there were agricultural workers and lands to be farmed, the land in and surrounding the very populous cities which Southern Black migrants settled did not have the capacity, nor interest, in supporting agricultural endeavors. This was not, primarily a way to discriminate against Southern migrants but a reflection on the industrialization of the North. The work that was available in many Northern cities centered on factory work and service jobs. Not only did Black migrants from the American South stand ill-equipped to handle the North's professional hurdles, but they also failed to become prepared for the physical, social, and economic climate of Northern cities.

Black churches within these Northern cities acted as sanctuaries and resource centers for Southern migrants. Churches like Abyssinian Baptist church in Harlem, Olivet Baptist church in Chicago, and Mother Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church in Philadelphia provided services to migrants. Due to this climate, a group of Baptist clergy gathered in Philadelphia to form a ministers association and a think tank in which they could discuss the needs of the people they served, some of which would have been part of the Great Migration. The ministers' conference sought not only to discuss the needs of the Southern migrant but to discuss means by which the local church might meet these situations with help and hope. In the same way that the church provided resources for the migrant and the stranger in the time called the Great Migration, the church in this age must convene as a think tank and social center to meet the needs of impoverished and disenfranchised persons in the community.

CHAPTER FOUR

THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS

The theological foundations present an examination of Walter Rauschenbusch and the Social Gospel as codified by him. Walter Rauschenbusch entered into community as a called covenantal participant. During the period from which the social gospel was launched, he served a small, poor, Baptist congregation in an area of New York City which would become known as Hell's Kitchen. While serving his small congregation of German immigrants and their descendants, he observed them and was moved by the needs he observed. After a time of wrestling with the seemingly unquenchable need among his people and among people like those he served, Rauschenbusch came to a point of crisis. His crisis had to do with the ways he had been taught concerning the value, purpose and nature of the gospel of Jesus Christ. If the gospel was to be good news, which he believed, what effect should this news have? Should it merely have a transformative and salvific effect on the souls of women and men? During his time of personal, intellectual, and spiritual struggle, Rauschenbusch heard the praying of the Lord's Prayer in a manner differently than he heard prior. The words "thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven" rang out. These words which he offered in prayer suddenly struck him as having not only a spiritual meaning but a spiritual application within the physical world.

In the later part of the nineteenth century, within Christian congregations and thought worlds, there arose a desire to address economic, social, and political conditions for persons living in the urbanized locale of the United States of America. This decentralized movement of progressive thinking Christians was called, “Social Christianity.” Later, this movement came to be called the “Social Gospel” and its proponents were called “social gospellers.” The Social Gospel Movement primarily addressed issues at the intersection of urbanization and industrialization.¹ The Social Gospel addressed the living and working conditions of those working in the cities; these persons were often poor.

The contention of many social gospellers was essentially that the capitalist environment, which had allowed such great strides in innovation and wealth generation in the United States, was also responsible for the cultivation of a culture of greed and lack. These were not moral policies but social, economic, and political policies for which the government was responsible, in so loosely regulating the activities of industry.² It was about the economic system that the Social Gospel concerned itself. In fact, many of the proponents of the Social Gospel seemed to gravitate to the tenants of socialism. One of the foremost historians of the Social Gospel Movement called socialism “Midwife and nurse to the social gospel.”³

¹ Samuel C. Shepherd, “Social Gospel,” in *Encyclopedia of American Urban History*, ed. David R. Goldfield (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, Inc., 2007), 739-740.

² Thomas Riggs, ed., “Social Gospel Movement,” in *Gale Encyclopedia of U.S. Economic History*, vol. 3 (Farmington Hills, MI: Gale, 2015).

³ Charles Howard Hopkins, *The Rise of the Social Gospel in American Protestantism, 1865-1915* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1940), 244.

The goal of the social gospel was conversion. This conversion was not only a spiritual conversion but an American societal conversion.⁴ Some viewed the Social Gospel as a demarcation that the church of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries had abandoned the theological precepts of Calvin, and others, shifting from theological concerns to “thoughts and feelings.” However, the emergence of the Social Gospel was thought to reorient a segment of Christianity from sentimentality to social concerns.⁵

Walter Rauschenbusch, who rightly or wrongly, became known as the progenitor of the social gospel, was born to German parents. Rauschenbusch’s parents were first generation immigrants to the United States from Germany.⁶ His father was highly educated in Germany and entered ministry as a Lutheran missionary. After a time in service to the Lutheran Church, he became a Baptist.⁷ It could be said that Rauschenbusch inherited a distinct understanding and practice of what it meant to be Baptist. This is to say that his parent’s roots in German Lutheran tradition were steadfast and evident in their pietistic practice of Christian faith and Baptist identity.⁸

His ministry as a pastor was shaped by the pietistic, even sober, and Baptist nature of his upbringing and education. Rauschenbusch, as a Baptist, had a zeal to reach people

⁴ Wendy J. Deichmann, “The Social Gospel as a Grassroots Movement,” *Church History* 84, no. 1 (2015): 203–206.

⁵ Brendan J. Wright, “Religious Faith as Political Praxis: Walter Rauschenbusch, Incarnational Religion, and the Social Gospel Cultus,” *American Political Thought* 7, no. 3 (Summer 2018): 432–463.

⁶ Klaus Jurgen Jaehn, *Rauschenbusch: The Formative Years* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 1976), 20.

⁷ Jaehn, *Rauschenbusch*, 20.

⁸ Jaehn, *Rauschenbusch*, 20.

with the gospel of Jesus Christ. His concern was for the souls of humanity, not with the flesh. It was not until he was faced with the harrowing and harsh realities of the faithful of his congregation, that he had a revelation that his understanding of the scope of the gospel might be incomplete. His congregation, flailing in an area of New York called “Hell’s Kitchen,” thrust him into a theological crisis with which he wrestled until he found blessing, understanding, and revelation. Rauschenbusch came to the notion that God was indeed concerned with the salvation of the souls of women and men, as he had always held. The element unlike his long-held belief was that God’s sole concern was not with the salvation of the soul alone. Something must be said about the poverty and injustice faced by his parishioners, living and working in squalor. His congregation was composed of working-class German immigrant stock. He noticed that they were plagued, victimized even, by the poor environmental conditions, subjugated by inequitable industry, and impoverished by an unjust economy.⁹ “Saved by his power divine, saved to new life sublime. Life now is sweet and my joy is complete for I’m saved, saved, saved.”¹⁰

Present in Rauschenbusch’s work is a large discussion around the theological theme of salvation. Of concern for Rauschenbusch is what salvation truly means for his parishioners who are struggling to survive in the subpar living conditions of 1920’s New York. In a letter to his mother, Rauschenbusch posed the question, “Is it for me to ask, “What is the gospel of Jesus Christ” and not “What is the Gospel of the people around

⁹ Paul M. Minus, *Walter Rauschenbusch: American Reformer* (New York, NY: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1988).

¹⁰ Jack P. Scholfield, “Saved, Saved!” in *The New National Baptist Hymnal*, ed. R. H. Boyd (Nashville, TN: National Baptist Publishing Board, 1977), 139.

me?”¹¹ The apparent meaning of the statement has to do with the gospel, the good news, to the people which surround him, in congregation and community, and the ways in which that message is as pertinent as the message of the gospel of Jesus Christ itself. The question posed by Rauschenbusch is akin to the question offered by Howard Thurman, “What does our faith say to the masses of men whose backs are against the wall?”¹² The larger question, here, is about salvation. More broadly, the issue with which Rauschenbusch wrestles seems to be the scope of the salvation provided in Christ.

At issue in, what could be argued to be, the essential corpus of Rauschenbusch’s work are questions around the meaning of salvation, the role of the church in salvation, and Jesus’ concern for issues plaguing the physicality of humankind. The question of the meaning of salvation flows directly from the core theological premise of his work. The second issue raised comes primarily from Rauschenbusch’s ontological orientation as Christian and pastor; for him the church is the unit by which the will of God is made manifest in the world. The third issue raised widely in Rauschenbusch is Jesus and his position on social issues rests in his Christian faith, his Baptist orientation, and his striving with the context of scripture and of his lived reality.¹³ These deeply theological issues raised are relevant in Rauschenbusch’s historical moment and the present; the church must wrestle with the personality of Jesus and the fuller understanding of salvation, as it continues to pray for God’s Kingdom to come and God’s will to be done in the earth as it is in heaven.

¹¹ Jaehn, *Rauschenbusch*, 12.

¹² Howard Thurman, *Jesus and the Disinherited* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1996), 13.

¹³ Jaehn, *Rauschenbusch*, 25.

In engaging this material, there are other theologians, streams of theological thought even, which present themselves, too, as worthy of exploration and examination. For the purposes of this chapter, the scope of engagement has been limited to Walter Rauschenbusch, his commentators, and interpreters. Where appropriate, allusions may be made to modern theologians whose writing will give perspective to the ideological core presented here. It is also worth noting that Rauschenbusch, himself, did not engage many established theological voices in the building of the Social Gospel locus. Perhaps, the only place Rauschenbusch engages an array of theological voices, outside of the Biblical canon, is his book *Theology for the Social Gospel*. This book is essentially a compilation of a theological system for the Social Gospel Movement. Rauschenbusch credits a few select persons with providing, what he called, “intellectual kindling” for the social gospel; Washington Gladden, congregational pastor and religion editor for the New York Independent; Josiah Strong, clergyman, editor, organizer, and author; Richard T. Ely, an economist. Of them Rauschenbusch wrote, “They had a spirit in them which kindled and compelled us.”¹⁴ The three men Rauschenbusch named provided more than intellectual kindling for the Social Gospel Movement. They were vocal and visible proponents of the movement, before Rauschenbusch codified and recorded the tenants of this theological and sociological movement in his writings.

In the following pages, with an aim toward escalating the idea and ideal of the Social Gospel, the ideological core of Rauschenbusch’s work will be explored. The following headings will give focus to the exposition of this theologian, his progression and growth, and theological grounding for the “Social Gospel.” He viewed the Social

¹⁴ Walter Rauschenbusch, *Christianizing the Social Order* (New York, NY: Macmillan Company, 1919), 9.

Gospel as having the ability to create, “a new type of Christian man(sic) who bears a striking family likeness to Jesus of Galilee.”¹⁵

Christianity and the Social Crisis

Christianity and the Social Crisis was Rauschenbusch’s first attempt at describing his social gospel and the process by which he arrived at the conclusion that God cared for the social needs of humanity as well as the need of their souls. Published in 1908, this work was published following his time of sabbatical in Germany. It was during his sabbatical that Rauschenbusch, in addition to seeking medical intervention for his diminished hearing, gave thought to his experiences and sought to codify his developing ideas concerning the social gospel.

The primary thrust of this literary work has to do with the shifting social culture at the dawn of the twentieth century, and the response of Christianity and the church in the abyss of the masses of need in juxtaposition with the greed of the upper class. The nineteenth century saw great technological advancements in the North American continent. The industrial revolution, while having its genesis on British soil in the eighteenth century, did not reach American soil until the early years of the nineteenth. With all the invention and innovation of this era, humans were still slave to labor. Only now, this labor, instead of merely breaking the back of the laborer, crushed the spirit.

In *Christianity and the Social Crisis*, Rauschenbusch presents a libretto for a conversation between the centuries. Into the hall of eternity enters the nineteenth century as its final moments set in the chronology of human consciousness. It enters, in

¹⁵ Walter Rauschenbusch, *For God and the People: Prayers of the Social Awakening* (Boston, MA: The Pilgrim Press, 1910), 10.

Rauschenbusch's imaginings, big, bold, and brash before the eighteen centuries which preceded it. It declared its innovations, technological, ideological, and sociological. It says, in sum, "I freed the thoughts of men. They face the facts and know. Their knowledge is common to all. The deeds of the East are known in the West at morn. They send their whispers under the seas and across the clouds. I broke the chains of bigotry and despotism. I made men free and equal. Every man feels the worth of his manhood. I have touched the summit of history. I did for mankind what none of you did before. They are rich. They are wise. They are free."¹⁶

The main thesis of the book is that Christianity, at the beginning of the twentieth century, confronts a time of immense social crisis, which simultaneously offers the disciples of Jesus Christ an unparalleled opportunity to work for the social order to fit more harmoniously with the demands of the Kingdom of God. Why did the early church seemingly abandon Jesus' teaching about the Kingdom of God? In effect, Rauschenbusch responded with a revisionist history of the early church, to account for the demise of the Kingdom of God as the central concept in Christian theology, and concluded that the contemporary church needed to reconnect with the revolutionary teachings of the Kingdom of God.

Christianizing the Social Order

Published in 1919, this work was composed primarily as a result of the success of his first book, *Christianity and the Social Crisis*. The success of his first text concerning the Social Gospel triggered an overwhelming response, throughout the church and

¹⁶ Rauschenbusch, *Christianity and the Social Crisis*, 211.

academy. Though there was appreciation and intrigue concerning this idea, there was also challenge and critique from scholars and church-persons alike. Following his return from a time of sabbatical in Germany, Rauschenbusch was inundated with this feedback and felt the need to respond to his critique and to further elaborate on themes presented in his earlier work.

The core of the material presented in this book is a result of an invitation to, and acceptance of, an opportunity to give lectures to present his ideas in the academy. This also allowed him, forced him to expound on his premises and theological grounding. These lectures were the Merrick lectures and the Earl lectures, delivered at Ohio Wesleyan University and Pacific Theological Seminary, respectively. The Merrick Lectures delivered at Ohio Wesleyan University came with the additional requirement that the lectures were to be published in book form. This gave Rauschenbusch further incentive to publish his ideas once again.¹⁷

The ideas laid out in the second work were not completely new, for Rauschenbusch. He uses this text as an opportunity to expound, in places, and make plain, in others, ideas expressed in his first writing. Perhaps the newest and most pronounced idea put forth in this writing was the concept of sin as the cause of social inequity. The use of theological terminology to address social issues is an innovation of his age. Perhaps his understanding of sin allows his theological vision to be comprehended by those persons who would misconstrue the importance, or order of importance, of personal and social salvation. For Rauschenbusch, these are inseparable.

¹⁷ Rauschenbusch, *Christianizing the Social Order*, vii.

This text is divided into six parts and each part is further divided into chapters. In the initial part of the text, “The Social Awakening of the Churches,” the three chapters within its bounds are given to present, in his day, social awakenings in religious organizations. He gives time and discussion to the role and the awakening of the church, yes, he also gives discussion to the role played by the country in the work of social awakening.

The natural resources of the country are passing into the control of a minority. An ever-increasing number of people are henceforth to live in a land owned by an ever-decreasing number... We have allowed private persons to put their thumb where they can constrict the lifeblood of the nation at will... The profits of our common work are absorbed by a limited group; the mass of the people are permanently reduced to wage-earning positions. The cost of living has been raised by unseen hands until several millions of our nation are unable to earn even the bare minimum which social science declares necessary for health and decency.¹⁸

The commentary put forth in these pages rings as relevant and true today as it did when Rauschenbusch penned these words. It is these condition to which Rauschenbusch senses that the nation is responding. Collective outrage and awakening he views as a catalyst for, more than social awakening, spiritual and even moral awakening within individuals and the collective. It is here that sin is exposed as the preeminent cause of the societal ills of greed. This then seeks to spread the truth of the gospel of Jesus Christ; Jesus saves. Preeminent here, is the desire to bring about a spirit of conviction and repentance. In Rauschenbusch’s view, sin is the greatest preacher of repentance.¹⁹ This repentance is from sin to a renewed moral awakening.

Since the church is integral to American common life, in his day, he desired to see the church take up the mantle of leadership in this revival of moral conscience. He

¹⁸ Rauschenbusch, *Christianizing the Social Order*, 1-2.

¹⁹ Rauschenbusch, *Christianizing the Social Order*, 4-5.

viewed moral revival, moral energy, as essentially religious energy. It is this energy which Rauschenbusch believed was, not simply inspired but, divine presence.²⁰

In part two, “The Revolutionary Destiny of Christianity,” Rauschenbusch makes plain his understanding that the church was established to be activist and activator, light and leaven, in the world. Also present is a desire that the church, whom Rauschenbusch viewed as, traditionally, preaching a personal salvation and repentance was called to now preach a collective salvation and moral transformation as well. The church, he noted, should find “newfound social application of religious life.” He cited the decline of men(sic) entering the traditional vocation of pastoral ministry, opting instead for para-church ministry such as in the YMCA, which would allow for the service of God and the service of those in the world. Most notably in this section, Rauschenbusch elevates denominations which have taken social positions and resolutions, most notably the Methodist’s and the Presbyterians.

Central to his entire argument of the church, being the initiator of this movement for moral revival, is his view that the Biblical prophets came preaching such transformation of political, social, and economic effect. Even in Jesus, Rauschenbusch argues, is found the desire to propagate this change in his teachings concerning the kingdom of God. Rauschenbusch argues that the modern church became divorced from these facets because of a divorce from Jewish roots, and adoption of Greek linguistic notions and cultural understandings, which changed Christian understandings especially regarding the physical realm and the eschaton.

²⁰ Rauschenbusch, *Christianizing the Social Order*, 6.

Theology for the Social Gospel

This text could be considered the magnum opus for Rauschenbusch's understanding of the social gospel. In this writing, he attempts to codify a theological system. Unique, perhaps, in this work is systematic theology is the comparison and contrast to other theologians and theological thought. He does this to explain what the social gospel is not, and to explain what the social gospel does not do nor believe. Also present in this work is the first real engagement of theologians and or theological systems.

For Rauschenbusch, the theological system of the social gospel begins with an entry on sin. The discussion of sin, for him, has its genesis with "the fall of man." He posits that in the Hebrew Bible, the concentration on this act as the nexus point for sin is Biblical cannon, in the Genesis account, the account of Adam and Eve consuming fruit from the forbidden tree was to explain the entrance of death and evil into human reality. Further, he claims that it was the Apostle Paul who brought this scenario to bear on the introduction of sin into the world. Rauschenbusch states a disagreement with Greek church fathers who might posit that sin is the result of sensuality and seduction. He finds, more faithful to historical Christianity the understanding of sin as selfishness. He wrote:

Sin is essentially selfishness. That definition is more in harmony with the social gospel than with any individualistic type of religion. The sinful mind, then, is the unsocial and anti-social mind. To find the climax of sin we must not linger over a man who swears, or sneers at religion, or denies the mystery of the trinity, but put our hands on social groups who have turned the patrimony of a nation into the private property of a small class, or have left the peasant laborers cowed, degraded, demoralized, and without rights in the land. When we find such in history, or in present-day life, we shall know we have struck real rebellion against God on the higher levels of sin. ²¹

²¹ Walter Rauschenbusch, *A Theology for the Social Gospel* (New York, NY: The Macmillan Company, 1922), 50.

Almost as an opposite bookend, Rauschenbusch ends this book with an entry on atonement, and how the social gospel understands and treats it. First, he reviews understandings of the atonement, beginning with pre Anselmian views. These views concern theories of Jesus being offered by God as a ransom to Satan for humanity. Satan over stepped Satan's bounds in killing Jesus, who was without sin, Satan overstepped his legal bounds and claims to Christ in death and hell. In Rauschenbusch's words, "God knew beforehand that even if Satan took possession of the ransom [Jesus], he could never hold Christ. So, God offered Satan a bait and tricked him. When Satan tried to imprison Christ in Hades, he burst the gates and came forth with a throng of souls."²²

The ransom theory of atonement was largely replaced by Anselm's theory of atonement in 1098 A.C.E. Anselmian theory focused on humanity causing God to be bereft of glory and honor. In order to satisfy the debt of sin, first there must be a suitable sacrifice to make God whole, in the economic sense. For Anselm, Jesus is that element which is suitable to answer the deficit humans have caused. The key term for Anselmian atonement is satisfaction. The understanding is that Jesus is the one who can satisfy the debt of sin.

Rauschenbusch, in this book, expresses his fundamental discontent with these theological frameworks to understand the atonement. Pre-Anselmian, Anselmian, and early protestant (Lutheran and Calvinist) understandings of the atonement, of what exactly happened on the Cross, were unsatisfactory for him and fundamentally unbiblical in his assessment. He wrote, "The fundamental terms and ideas [expressed in these theories of atonement] – "satisfaction," "substitution," "imputation," "merit" – are post

²² Rauschenbusch, *A Theology for the Social Gospel*, 241.

Biblical ideas, and are alien from the spirit of the gospel.”²³ For Rauschenbusch, a better understanding of the atonement lies in Christ dying for the cause of solidarity with humanity.

This would alter the relation between God and humanity from antagonism to co-operative unity of will; not by a legal transaction but, by the presence of a new and decisive factor embodied in the racial life which affected its spiritual value and potency. When men would learn to understand and love God; and when God could by anticipation see his own life appropriated by men, God and men would enter into spiritual solidarity and this would be the only effective reconciliation.²⁴

The Social Principals of Jesus

The text of *The Social Principals of Jesus* was constructed as an educational tool. This book was written and presented as the seventh installment in a series of seven textbooks developed on behalf of groups such as the Young Men’s Christian Association and Young Women’s Christian Association. This material was to be used for college aged Christian Educational programming such as Sunday school and College Ministry study and fellowship groups. This series reflects Rauschenbusch’s hope that the future of the church would grasp his ideals and bring them to fruition, ushering the kingdom of God into the realm of lived reality.

This volume was not intended to serve as a study guide into the biography of Jesus. It was intended to, “formulate in simple propositions the fundamental convictions of Jesus about the social and ethical relations and duties of men(sic).”²⁵ Rauschenbusch

²³ Rauschenbusch, *A Theology for the Social Gospel*, 243.

²⁴ Rauschenbusch, *A Theology for the Social Gospel*, 265.

²⁵ Walter Rauschenbusch, *The Social Principals of Jesus* (New York, NY: Association Press, 1919), xi.

made an evaluation of the times, needs, desires, and questions, he perceived, of faithful Christian youth. He wrote:

Our generation is profoundly troubled by the problems of organized society. The most active interest of serious men and women in the colleges is concentrated on them. We know that we are in deep need of moral light and spiritual inspiration in our groupings. There is an increasing realization, too, that the salvation of society lies in the direction toward which Jesus led.²⁶

A modern gospel song offers the lyrics, “Jesus is the answer for the world today. Beside him there’s no other, Jesus is the way.”²⁷ Rauschenbusch would have been in full agreement with these sentiments. He really and truly believed that if humans had a clear view of Jesus, his desires, and his teachings, the world’s ills could be met by those who follow him.

This work is organized into four parts: The Axiomatic Social Convictions of Jesus, The Social Ideal of Jesus, The Recalcitrant Social Forces, and Conquest by Conflict. In each of these sections, there are three further divisions which elaborate on the theme. In language geared toward college aged youth, Rauschenbusch presented detailed exposition of the personality and ultimate concerns of Jesus. Each chapter is further divided into a section of daily scripture readings, material for study, and questions which require the participant to reflect critically upon the scriptures and content presented in each section. The scriptures presented, in full text, in the book are presented in a daily devotional format; allocating one scripture for each day of the week along with a short reflection which connects the scripture to the Christocentric theme. Following a full week, seven days, of scripture readings are followed by three or more sections of content

²⁶ Rauschenbusch, *The Social Principles of Jesus*, xi.

²⁷ Andre Crouch and Sandra Crouch, “Jesus Is the Answer for the World Today,” in *The New National Baptist Hymnal*, 21st century ed. (Nashville, TN: R. H. Boyd Publishing Corporation, 2001), 70.

which intends to focus the tenor of scripture readings to discuss, what were then, pressing issues within the surrounding society and culture. The following questions have been delineated with themes corresponding to their respective section of content.

The first division of this text, *The Axiomatic Social Convictions of Jesus*, begins with it an array of biblical pericopes, which display, what Rauschenbusch believes to be, essential and unquestionable values, which Jesus treasured in his time on earth and must then be important to his followers. Life, particularly the value of the lives of human beings is the first axiom delineated. To illustrate his point, Rauschenbusch elevates the following pericopes: Mark 10:13-16; Matthew 8:1-4; Matthew 5:21, 22; Luke 15:1-10; Luke 19:10; Matthew 20:1-16; John 8:2-11. Using these biblical texts, Rauschenbusch makes conjecture about Jesus' care for the lives of children, those cast out in modern society, and Jesus' sense of respect for all persons.

Rauschenbusch further explores the theme of the value of human life, not to be conflated with the modern Evangelical Christian conversation about abortion issues, by exploring the theme of human family. In a discussion about family, he highlights the interconnectedness of humanity. He wrote:

None ever felt this social unity of our race more deeply than Jesus. To him it was sacred and divine. Hence his emphasis on love and forgiveness. He put his personality behind the natural instinct of social attraction and encouraged it. He swung the great force of religion around to bear on it and drive it home. Anything that substitutes antagonism for fraternity is evil to him. Just as in the case of the natural cohesion of men(sic), he lifted the blind instinct of human nature by the insight of religion and constituted it a fundamental principal of life. ²⁸

Due to the connectedness of humanity as family, Rauschenbusch also discussed the importance of standing together in solidarity. The ways in which humans must advocate

²⁸ Rauschenbusch, *The Social Principals of Jesus*, 23.

for each other is through solidarity. This only happens, in his mind, if there is a realization that this relationality of the human family extends beyond persons with which one identifies or considers themselves apart. Making remarkably clear his point, Rauschenbusch wrote, “The man (sic) who intelligently realizes the Chinese and the Zulu as his brothers (sic) with whom he must share the earth, is an ampler mind – other things being equal – than the man (sic) who can think of humanity only in terms of pale faces.”²⁹

The book continues with a section titled the social ideals of Jesus. This section is further divided into discussions of the Kingdom of God and the New Age. The First section, divided into three chapters, was oriented to discuss the importance Jesus placed on human dignity, worth, and relationship. Part two, consisting of three chapters, attempts to shift the conversation to the Kingdom of God. In so doing, he makes clear his point that the ways in which Jesus addressed humankind, as discussed in part one, those very principals translate into values which Jesus held which are aligned with the Kingdom of God, its order, ethic, and purpose. These, Rauschenbusch posits, are values taken from the life and narrative of Israel’s relationship with God. He illustrates his point with discussions of Jesus’ parables which focus on the Kingdom of God. The eschatological joy of finding the kingdom, reaching the kingdom, sacrificing for the kingdom, the invaluable worth of the Kingdom is conveyed in this portion of the series. The following chapter gives attention to the work of the kingdom and the ways in which humanity might have a share in it. Concerning Jesus’ modeling of Kingdom work and his zeal for it, Rauschenbusch wrote:

²⁹ Rauschenbusch, *The Social Principals of Jesus*, 27.

He communicated energy to others. He Hated mere talk and discouraged fruitless theorizing. He praised energetic actions when he found it, as in the case of Zacchaeus, and of the men who climbed the roof with a paralytic man and dug up the roofing to let him down to Jesus. He called that sort of thing “faith”. Faith, in Jesus’ use of the word, did not mean shutting your eyes and folding your hands...Let us clear our minds forever of the idea that Jesus was a mild and innocuous person who parted his hair and beard in the middle, and turned his disciples into mollycoddles. Away with it!³⁰

Rauschenbusch lauded, the work of persons doing the work of foreign missions. He praised them to high degree because of their making Christian faith actionable in their lives. Setting aside idle theory to engage persons of different backgrounds for the sake of the kingdom. It does not appear that he was aware of the effects of foreign missions and missionaries as an effective and tremendous colonizing force of White supremacy and White supremacist ideals around the world. Although, his aim is to spread this news of the Kingdom of God, his motives seem to respect the differences of people and culture.

In part three, Rauschenbusch deals with social forces which are uncooperative with the manifestation of the Kingdom of God. These forces were identified by Rauschenbusch as “human nature” and “conservative forces of society.” The forces of human nature are concerned with the heart and mind of human beings, in the proverbial sense, the heart has to do with the stubbornness and hardness which is innate in human nature. The desire within humanity for power, position, and possessions, act as a barrier for the free flow necessary for the Kingdom of God to be made manifest amid human reality.

The final part of the book is titled “Conquest by Conflict.” In this section, Rauschenbusch talks about the previously discussed recalcitrant forces of modern society and the ways in which they might be brought into submission. Rauschenbusch, on the

³⁰ Rauschenbusch, *The Social Principles of Jesus*, 72.

matter of conquering contrary forces, wrote, “The advance of the Kingdom of God is not simply a process of social education, but a conflict with hostile forces which resist, neutralize, and defy whatever works toward the true social order.”³¹ He saw the contrary action to the furtherance of the Kingdom of God as evil which must be tamed and or vanquished so that the Kingdom of God might have the necessary environment to exist.

The fact that Jesus realized evil in individuals and society, that he reckoned with it practically, and that he set himself against it with singleness of purpose, constitutes another of his social principals. No view of life which blurs the fact of evil would have seemed to him an illusion. He would have foretold failure of any policy based on it. His great social problem was redemption from evil. Every step of approach toward the Kingdom of God must be won by conflict.³²

For the sake of the kingdom of God, no price is too great.

Conclusion

Christians are constantly confronted with the classic question of theodicy; “why do bad things happen to good people.” For some, this question, this wrestle, this internal ideological and theological struggle causes a decline in belief. Daily there are reported abuses of children, the elderly, minority populations and immigrants. What does the gospel of Jesus Christ say to, or about, these people who are between the rock of injustice and the hardened hearts of those who wield power? Rauschenbusch struggled with the grim, and often morbid, realities of the people he was called to serve. This struggle caused him to wrestle in ways in which he was uncomfortable. Rauschenbusch’s internal struggle led him to a deeper study of scripture to examine and discover what meaning salvation must have for people and what effect it must have.

³¹ Rauschenbusch, *The Social Principals of Jesus*, 151.

³² Rauschenbusch, *The Social Principals of Jesus*, 158.

Ideological struggle, with the issues of the day, is worth engaging. For Rauschenbusch it led to a renewed way of hearing and a liberating way of reading the scripture. There is testimony in the biblical record of a man named Jacob who wrestled with God through the night and would not let go until he received a blessing from the Lord. The Social Gospel was that blessing. The expansive notion of the Kingdom of God was that blessing. A wider understanding was that blessing. Further view into, what Rauschenbusch understood to be the will of God, “on earth as it is in heaven” was the blessing.

As the church called to be in the world, what Rauschenbusch espouses in work which calls for conscience and fortitude. To be initiators of the kingdom of God, to be the human capital and driving force behind a change of social and political policy, are we prepared? A vocal segment of the church of Jesus Christ has overwhelmingly made their position known about the ways in which God is concerned with being in relationship with humanity. Those who have hijacked the name “Evangelical” have made clear stances on abortion and other social issues. They have influenced politicians and legislation to meet their goals. Is it possible that the, perceived, less vocal faction of the church within the United States of America can make their voices heard and wishes known in the public and political square? Persons such as the Rev. Dr. William J. Barber, II, the Rev. Traci D. Blackmon, the Rev. Dr. James Forbes, Jr., and Sister Simone Campbell have joined forces, traveling through this nation proclaiming a need for moral revival. Is the church of Jesus Christ in the position to be the initiator of the Kingdom of God? Is the church of Jesus Christ prepared to take a stance against the very atrocities and injustices Rauschenbusch witnessed? The time is now. The gospel of liberation, inclusion, and

empowerment proclaimed in our pulpits is the very same good news needed in the public square. Some would take this further, by suggesting that the structure and leadership of the Christian church must shift in order to truly be Christian and faithful. Perhaps an example should be taken from the Black Church in America; for whom the Gospel of Jesus Christ and social aspects of wider society have always been yoked.³³

Rauschenbusch had an encounter with the reality of the persons he was called to serve. He entered their reality of sickness, premature death, unfair legal policy, inequitable fiscal and economic practices. It sent Rauschenbusch into a time of wrestling. The church of Jesus Christ, the individuals who are the members of the body of Christ must encounter the realities of today's society. Sadly, the realities of modern time mirror, in many ways, the realities Rauschenbusch's contemporaries faced. How shall we pray together, worship together, reason together, lobby together, vote together, protest together that the will of God might be made manifest in modern time. The prayer Jesus gave his disciples as a model ought to orient the desires of the church and of individuals who claim salvation on account of Jesus Christ and his sacrifice. Perhaps, advocating for the coming, the manifestation, of the Kingdom of God in the earth requires submission and sacrifice. Will the church surrender itself to the will of God in sacrifice and service? Will the church ever muster the courage to echo the words Jesus uttered in the garden of Gethsemane, "Father... not my will but yours be done" (Lk: 22:42).

³³ Paul O. Bischoff, "Social Gospel," *First Things: A Monthly Journal of Religion and Public Life*, no. 239 (2014): 10, accessed March 1, 2019, Academic OneFile, http://proxy.library.upenn.edu:2084/apps/doc/A354182605/AONE?u=upenn_main&sid=AONE&xid=05ae88a3.

CHAPTER FIVE

INTERDISCIPLINARY FOUNDATIONS

The focus of this project deals with persons in community, and the role of the church in attempting to address, and or meet, those needs as part and parcel of the work of Christ in the world. The church is the body of Christ. As such it is incumbent upon it to exist and move in the world as Christ did in his life and ministry on earth. The examples modeled by Christ were relevant during His time on earth and remain relevant models for twenty first century churches.

This chapter will explore Social Constructivist theory. Within the academic study of social work, there are copious theories which attend to humans in community. While many of the theories contain similarities, they each have an individual twist which makes them unique enough to merit critical review. Social Constructivism is a theoretical framework which gives respect and attention to human communities. In particular, the ways in which Social Constructivist theory respects and appreciates the insight and inherent worth of communities which have been marginalized, and/or “othered,” is noteworthy. The Social Constructivist theoretical framework will serve as a conversation partner for the project.

According to the national association of social workers, social work is a helping profession. Moreover, they define it in this way; “The primary mission of the social work profession is to enhance human well-being and help meet basic and complex needs of all

people, with a particular focus on those who are vulnerable, oppressed, and living in poverty.”¹

The gospels attest, Jesus walked the earth teaching, preaching, and living in community. As part of his existing in community, Jesus carried out the ministries inherent in his nature, healing, restoration and reconciliation. As Jesus healed the sick, gave sight to persons who were blind, restored the form and function of the extremities of persons hampered by deformity and incapacity. Social work, in its many theories and models of practice, is highly compatible with theories and praxis of theologies concerned with care for, and empowerment of, humanity in community. In fact, the modern discipline and practice of social work has deep roots in the church.²

As a social science, the academic discipline of social work gives insight into what might be considered best practices for engaging persons in community. Engaging the discipline of social work provides the opportunity to interact with theory which has been examined by practice and practices which have been weighed by theory.³ In addition, there is a continual discussion concerning the value of social work to religion and the value of religion to social work. The case was posed by Frederic Siedenburg that the miracle performed by Jesus, the feeding of the multitude with two fish and five loaves of bread identifies closely with the aims of professional social work. He wrote:

¹ “Why Choose the Social Work Profession,” National Association of Social Workers, accessed February 14, 2019, <https://www.socialworkers.org/Careers/Career-Center/Explore-Social-Work/Why-Choose-the-Social-Work-Profession>.

² Alexander Johnson, “Alexander Johnson: 1847-1941,” *Social Service Review* 15, no. 3 (1941): 564-66, accessed February 14, 2019, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/30013722>.

³ Kenneth L. M. Pray, “Some Reasons for the Development of the Professional School,” *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 121 (1925): 169-71, accessed February 14, 2019, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1015600>.

The miracle of the loaves and fishes well symbolizes the doctrine of religion and the practice of social work. The multitude followed the Divine Master, allured by his gospel and he, seeing their need, wrought a miracle. He had compassion on the multitude to whom he broke the bread of life-here was the doctrine of religion; he satisfied their temporal needs by well-ordered charity, for they were divided into companies of fifty and the fragments left over were conserved-here was the practice of social work. Did religion and social work meet in the desert of Judea and have they since that time traveled the Christian centuries together?⁴

The Social Constructivist theoretical framework lends, to those who employ it, tools with which to understand and integrate into community for the sake of all, both interventionist and community. The project will be more suitably met by employing many of the tenants proposed in the Social Constructivist framework.

The following pages will provide details concerning Social Constructivism, its proponents, components, and interdisciplinary adaptations. Then the intersection of Social Constructivist theory with the foundations of the project, biblical, historical, and theological will be discussed. Finally, the typology of the intersectionality of the academic discipline of social work and the Social Constructivist framework within the discipline will be discussed, utilizing Barbour's models of categorizing the relationship between scientific and religious concepts.

Social Constructivist Framework

Pioneered by Lev Vygotsky, Jerome Bruner, a psychologist with special interest and contributions to the areas of human cognitive psychology and cognitive learning theory in educational psychology; Jean Piaget, a psychologist who made lasting impact in the area of children's cognition; and John Dewey, a philosopher whose work in social

⁴ Frederic Siedenburg, "The Religious Value of Social Work," *American Journal of Sociology* 27, no. 5 (1922): 637-45, accessed February 14, 2019, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2764868>.

reform and education, social constructivism is an interdisciplinary concept, or distillation of concepts. The social constructivist framework is a broad framework which has been applied to many disciplines. Education and the social sciences made use of this framework because of the adaptability and effect on their intended audiences. The social constructivist framework prizes the elements of context, dialogue, and empowerment.

According to Hutchison and Charlesworth:

The social constructivist perspective focuses on how people learn, through their interactions with each other, to classify the world and their place in it. People are seen as social beings who interact with each other and the physical world based on shared meanings or shared understandings about the world. In this view, from social interaction, and these understandings shape their subsequent social interactions.⁵

Because of the contextual focus of the Social Constructivist framework, there is an intentionality and focus on the creation of shared understandings and meanings. In the contextualization and creation of shared understandings, those that were perceived as other, to be researched, studied, receive intervention, or acted upon, are brought to the center of the discussion. This leads to a solution which arises from the lifeworld of an othered community to produce solutions which can be lasting and meaningful not only for those imposing intervention, but also for those who are the recipients, co-creators even, of the intervention. This framework, because of the interaction necessary to come to an effective result, creates space and relationships to challenge assumptions, debunk myths, and issue correctives to negative perceptions concerning the othered community. Greater even than its ability to give othered, marginalized, diverse communities face and voice, the framework of social constructivism has the power to impact the understanding

⁵ Elizabeth D. Hutchison and Leann Wood Charlesworth, "Theoretical Perspectives on Human Behavior," *Semantics Scholars*, accessed February 14, 2019, <https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/151a/6303c857c1c691c8db4ff95eea9e375aa411.pdf>.

of those seeking to do action with those in community. Often, in intervention, the interventionists can see themselves, because of social, societal, racial, or economic factors, in ways that may not reflect the ways in which they are viewed by the wider world. Social Constructivism acts to humanize and even humble the interventionists. It can provide a mirror with which to view attitudes and actions.

Charles Horton Cooley, in a 1902 article entitled, “The Looking Glass Self,” posits that one’s self, as the concept is developed in the mind of the individual, is dependent on the thoughts and perceptions of others. He identifies three premises which give shape to his idea. The first of the three premises are that “I/we imagine how I/we appear to others; Second, “I/we imagine their judgement of me; Third, I/we develop feelings about the self, based on the imagined judgements about me.”⁶ Essentially, in Cooley’s understanding, the self, is defined in community with others. In contrast with the Rene Descartes philosophical understanding of the self, “I think therefore I am,” Cooley’s framework might form the statement in this way, “I think I am what I imagine others think I am.” Without a community about which persons can reflect, the self could go undefined, undeveloped, unchallenged, and unexplored. It is the understanding of the self in community, even in communities which do not reflect one’s notions of themselves, that growth happens. The Social Constructivist framework allows for this construction, reframing, and challenging of the self each time the interventionist enters community, covenant, and partnership with community to address presenting needs and issues.

⁶ Charles Cooley, “The Looking Glass Self,” Lumen Learning, accessed February 20, 2019, <https://courses.lumenlearning.com/boundless-sociology/chapter/theories-of-socialization/>.

Social Constructivism and social work intersect in the praxis of the precepts of social work and the work of social work on the ground. The quintessential phraseology of the practice of Social Work, “begin where the client is,” is reinvigorated by the Social Constructivist framework and thought. This is so, because the social constructivist perspective begins not with an exhaustive study of a problem to be addressed but by entering relationship and community with those persons identified to receive intervention. Not only does a social constructivist framework yield an entering into of community and relationship with those persons who are to receive intervention, it further humanizes and empowers persons in community with voice and agency, because it calls for the input of persons in community to be considered in assessing the situation to be encountered. It also requires that the interventionists and those receiving intervention collaborate, co-create even, solutions to identified issues. This happens first by creating space for those persons in community to put forth their desires and end goals.

As it pertains to social work, the social constructivist framework provides and ethical and solution focused means through which to enter the lives of people to work for change. This is contrary to other means of intervention which take into priority the desire, planning, and voice of the interventionists. This solution focuses much effort into engaging persons in context, persons in community, in engaging in their own uplift by promoting a collaborative, responsive, contextually appropriate development of solutions rather than the imposition of foreign solutions, conceived and imposed by foreigners, strangers, and interlopers to a particular community. The voices of the marginalized, othered, and oppressed are centered in their conversation; this is just action.⁷

⁷ Mo Yee Lee and Gilbert Greene, “Using Social Constructivism in Social Work Practice,” in *Social Workers’ Desk Reference* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2002), 143-149.

The project addresses the theme of intervention for the sake of wholeness. God is concerned with the entirety of humanity, not their souls alone. Social constructivist theory, when applied to social work or other disciplines, is intended to be a means by which intervention takes place. To address concerns of persons in community, dealing with the areas which comprise the whole of an individual, requires an intervention. Social Constructivism gives shape to several means to enter community. The model which most closely aligns with Social Constructivism and display a pronounced and demonstrated commitment to respect context and community, is *Roberts' Model of Crisis Intervention*. This model has seven steps or stages which do a serviceable job of addressing concerns in a wholistic way; tending to present needs and concerns while making space to tend human concerns to be heard, to be in community, to be validated. The steps are as follows:

1. Assess safety and lethality - this step calls for the gleaning and understanding of persons with which interventionists are seeking to be in community. This assessment might take account of biological (physical health, disability, genetic vulnerability), psychological (self-esteem, coping skills, social skills), social (peers, family dynamics, work, school), and co/inter/intra-related factors.
2. Rapport building – this step calls for the interventionist to act swiftly to enter into relationship and community with the individuals to which service is to be rendered.
3. Problem Identification – probes client to discover which things have come to unfavorable ends and why they believe this is so. In this stage, problems should be triaged or prioritized depending on the needs and desires of the clients(s)
4. Address Feelings – Create space for the client to come to voice concerning the issues they have raised. Be careful to validate the client's feelings concerning the issues which have come to voice.
5. Generating Alternatives – Develop a plan with the client to address the needs they have identified. This is to be done while taking into account what ways

and means, with in communal, personal, or institutional memory have helped in past experiences.

6. Develop Action Plan – Bring the client from point of crisis to resolution, utilizing the steps negotiated in the previous stage. Also, help the client begin to make meaning of the crisis event.
7. Follow Up – Stay connected with the client to evaluate the client's progress, success, and satisfaction with the corrective action.⁸

These seven stages call for any interventionists, to enter into community, at the point of their client or communities need, to listen, accompany, and respond in ways which respect their humanity and bring about treatment and resolution which the client or community has stated that it needs. This tends to wholistic needs, because it considers a person's needs for community, validation, understanding, agency and empowerment, as well as developing actions to address more tangible needs.

Interaction with Biblical Foundations

Circumcise, then, the foreskin of your heart, and do not be stubborn any longer. For the Lord your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great God, mighty and awesome, who is not partial and takes no bribe, who executes justice for the orphan and the widow, and who loves the strangers, providing them food and clothing. You shall also love the stranger, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt (Ex. 10:16-19).

In the Old Testament foundations, God, having entered covenant and relationship with Israel, makes judgements of and against them. The judgments God makes have to do with their duty toward those who have been marginalized. The marginalized groups identified are orphans, widows, and foreigners who are sojourning through their land.

⁸ Albert R. Roberts and Allen J. Ottens, "The Seven-Stage Crisis Intervention Model: A Road Map to Goal Attainment, Problem Solving, and Crisis Resolution," *Brief Treatment and Crisis Intervention* 5, no. 4 (2005): 329-339, accessed February 1, 2019, https://triggered.edina.clockss.org/ServeContent?rft_id=info:doi/10.1093/brief-treatment/mhi030.

These people groups represent vulnerable populations which are without power, voice, representation, care and consideration. God commands Israel to tend to these groups as God tended to them.

It would be a disservice, here, to see God as the interventionist and Israel as the community which is in need of intervention. God, while staging an intervention of sorts, is calling God's people, Israel, to the task of care of the marginalized, within and outside of their community. The first thing God calls them to do is to circumcise or open their hearts. According to the social constructivist framework as applied within the field of social work, the first thing that an interventionist must do is open their heart to community with which they are seeking to collaborate for service, empowerment, and uplift.

The pericope examined as biblical foundation ends in God's pronouncement of concern for those who are marginalized. Also, God makes certain to remind Israel that they too were marginalized, and God intervened on their behalf. Social Constructivism is not merely a call to action to or with, nor is it a call to sympathy. The social constructivist framework is a call to accompaniment with those who have been disenfranchised. Accompaniment with those who are disenfranchised looks like entering into unfamiliar community, offering a listening ear, collaborating for the sake of solutions, aiding in the implementation of those solutions, and remaining in contact to follow-up on progress. In the New Testament pericope, Jesus offers a parable to answer a question about qualification. The question posed by a religious lawyer is "Who is my neighbor?" More plainly the question is who is deserving of my help? The pericope, Luke 10:25-37, is commonly called the parable of the Good Samaritan. Jesus paints an image of a man who

has been beaten, bloodied, stripped of clothing, stripped of possessions, and nearly stripped of life. The man described in the pericope is not given a name, he is not given a voice, he is not given any identifiers to speak of nationality or social status. The only information given concerns his gender, where he was, and how this encounter occurred. This man has been marginalized, by lack of name and lack of voice; and victimized, by the robbers who strip him of belongings and left him for dead. Jesus lifts examples of men of Jewish ethnicity and of status who decline to offer aid to the marginalized and victimized man who lives with his life hanging in the balance on the Jericho road. Then Jesus introduces a man, of a despised ethnic minority, who offers aid.

Since the injured man, lying in the road, has been stripped of identity, by robbers and by Jesus, and because this unnamed man is not given voice, it is unlikely that this Samaritan was able to enter into dialogue about what issues were most pressing and collaborating for an equitable solution which took into account the man's personal and cultural heritage. In that vain, the social constructivist ideal of collaboration could not have been honored because of the injured man's sheer inability. However, the Samaritan does display behaviors that would be aligned with social constructivist ideals of intervention. The Samaritan man enters community with the injured man. In this the Samaritan makes himself vulnerable, possibly to a similar treatment the unidentified victim received. The Samaritan pledges to use his means alone to address this man's need, social constructivist thought does not wholly support the action. However, when an individual or group is in severe need or danger, perhaps there is not the ability to assess and collaborate. The framework of Social Constructivism seems best suited to aid

individuals who have faces, names, need, and need to be empowered. In situations where the only option is to act swiftly, or not at all, this framework might not be advantageous.

Interaction with Theological Foundations

The theological foundations present an examination of Walter Rauschenbusch and the Social Gospel as he codified it. Walter Rauschenbusch entered community as a called covenantal participant. In the period from which the social gospel was launched, he served a small, poor, Baptist congregation in an area of New York City which would become known as “Hell’s Kitchen.” While serving his small congregation of German immigrants and their descendants, he observed them and was moved by the needs he observed. After a time of wrestling with the seemingly unquenchable need among his people and among people like those he served, Rauschenbusch came to a point of crisis. His crisis had to do with the ways he had been taught concerning the value, purpose and nature of the gospel of Jesus Christ. If the gospel was to be good news, which he believed, what effect should this news have? Should it merely have a transformative and salvific effect on the souls of women and men? During his time of personal, intellectual, and spiritual struggle, Rauschenbusch heard the praying of the Lord’s Prayer in a manner differently than he heard them prior. The words thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven rang out. These words which he offered in prayer suddenly struck him as having not only a spiritual meaning but a spiritual application within the physical world.

Rauschenbusch, through interaction with the biblical text, and with some secular ideology, developed this idea of a social gospel. This social gospel would concern itself

with the kingdom of God and the church as the initiator of this kingdom and action in the world. Social Constructivism values as well as a sharing of context, the creation of shared meaning and understanding:

Constructionists view knowledge and truth as created not discovered by the mind (Schwandt 2003) and supports the view that being a realist is not inconsistent with being a constructionist. One can believe that concepts are constructed rather than discovered yet maintain that they correspond to something real in the world. This is consistent with the idea of Berger and Luckmann (1991) and the subtle realism of Hammersley (1992) in that reality is socially defined but this reality refers to the subjective experience of everyday life, how the world is understood rather than to the objective reality of the natural world. As Steedman (2000) notes, most of what is known and most of the knowing that is done is concerned with trying to make sense of what it is to be human, as opposed to scientific knowledge. Individuals or groups of individuals define this reality.⁹

With respect to the “Kingdom of God” envisioned by Rauschenbusch, there is an element of social constructivist value. In that this kingdom reality is constructed from a biblical textual perspective, and from a theological perspective, but as yet had not been made manifest in real time. Rauschenbusch’s conjecture about what the Kingdom of God is, and does, is constructed, imagined, envisioned based on the community comprised of himself, the biblical narrative, and those who are in need of intervention.

Interaction with Historical Foundations

The Great Migration was a phenomenon in American history, during which a large number of African Americans made the journey North. The American South, the locus of American slavery, had been home to a vast majority of the United States’ African American population. They lived in the, largely rural and predominantly

⁹ Tom Andrews, “What is Social Constructionism? Grounded Theory Review,” *An International Journal* 11, no. 1 (June 2012), accessed February 14, 2019, <http://groundedtheoryreview.com/2012/06/01/what-is-social-constructionism/>.

agricultural South. American slavery was based on chattel enslavement of persons of African descent. Following the emancipation proclamation, issued by president Abraham Lincoln, and reconstruction, a period in American history in which amends were attempted toward emancipated persons and their descendants, African Americans sought to journey to the northern part of the United States in order to seek economic opportunity, jobs, and dignity.

When African Americans arrived in the North, they were confronted with challenges unlike those faced in the South. Some of these challenges were frigid winters, an urban job market, higher costs of living, and hostile attitudes of some Northern African Americans. Many of the Northern migrants, being woefully unprepared for life in the North, took refuge in a familiar space. They sought out churches to ground themselves in community. Some Northern urban churches acted as welcoming and resource centers for the migrants. They provided not only a spiritual community, but tangible resources such as job training, childcare, social community, and other needs.

Social Constructivist theory would posit that the best means to enter a relationship for the sake of intervention is to enter community. Since African American migrants were moving North, and joining churches, the initial step of entering community was broached differently. Also, Northern congregations and communities, acting as interventionists, often had knowledge of how to survive in contexts which the migrants from the south simply did not have at their disposal. There may not have been a sharing of wisdom or validation of emotions because there may not have been the time or space to share. The urgency of need of the migrants from the South did not allow for the luxury of dialogue.

The social constructivist framework does not seem to be a rapid action response strategy. Social Constructivism works best when there is time and space for dialogue and the building of relationship. The strength of Social Constructivism is the value placed on honoring the voice, history, and values, ethics, wisdom, and experience of those who are receiving intervention.

Although there is not wide evidence of the presence of a social constructivist ethic, elements which later may have been counted as social constructivist values were employed by Olivet Baptist Church in Chicago, IL. The Olivet Baptist Church in Chicago, led by Lacy Kirk Williams, employed the services of two social workers. These social workers were tasked with taking a census of those participants in the great migration now living within their community. With an understanding of these persons and their needs, Olivet tailored the services they offered to the needs of those they sought to serve. There is alignment with a constructivist value, in allowing the people group slated to receive intervention to state their needs. In this way the interventionist does not provide a resource which the community does not desire nor find useful. An intervention is ultimately of no positive effect if the resources provided are undesired and thus unutilized by community.

In ways, the Olivet Baptist Church did invite those migrants from the rural and agricultural environs of the Southern United States to be part of their community. To clarify, they were invited to be part of their worshipping community. There is no evidence that the style, frequency, nor content of their worship was in any way altered, positively or negatively, by the presence of these persons. This serves as an indicator that Olivet's invitation to community was an invitation to assimilate into an already formed

community with established rules, roles, and rituals. Social Constructivist ethics might suggest that one seeks to gain access to the othered community and become familiar with their ways of being and doing for the sake of collaborative strategizing and action. The constructivists goal is always engaging, empower, and enact. Perhaps, this would not have been a good model for those migrating from the South nor those seeking to aid them. Perhaps the road to success for migrants from the South was assimilation and full integration into Northern African American Society.

In the project, a dialogical approach will be used to engage and make use of Social Constructivist theory and the interaction with the foundations. The Social Constructivist theory was born out of sociology and has been adapted for use in various fields including social work. Social work, beginning its life in and of the work of the church, can come to some dialogue with religious precepts. This should be especially so when dealing with parallel ideals, aiding and empowering persons in community.

Summary

The modern academic discipline of social work has religious roots. More specifically, Social Work has roots in the Christian tradition and in the church.¹⁰ Social Work, as well as other human centered disciplines, such as psychology, place emphasis on the aid they are able to yield to humanity, in providing valuation of effectiveness. In much the same way, churches value humanity. This is reinforced in the biblical cannon, and in various streams of theological thought. Paul, a Christian apostle called the church the “Body of Christ.” The Body of Christ about which Paul wrote, he described as being

¹⁰ Johnson, “Alexander Johnson,” 564-66, accessed February 14, 2019, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/30013722>.

comprised of various “members” with roles, responsibilities, gifts and graces. These members are people, Paul’s illustration is to present each person as playing an integral role in the “Body of Christ”, just as the heart, lungs, and kidneys play in the human body.

Thus, the church is concerned too with humanity and its collective impact. First

Corinthians 12:12-27 states:

Just as a body, though one, has many parts, but all its many parts form one body, so it is with Christ. For we were all baptized by one Spirit so as to form one body—whether Jews or Gentiles, slave or free—and we were all given the one Spirit to drink. Even so the body is not made up of one part but of many. Now if the foot should say, “Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body,” it would not for that reason stop being part of the body. And if the ear should say, “Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body,” it would not for that reason stop being part of the body. If the whole body were an eye, where would the sense of hearing be? If the whole body were an ear, where would the sense of smell be? But in fact God has placed the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be. If they were all one part, where would the body be? As it is, there are many parts, but one body. The eye cannot say to the hand, “I don’t need you!” And the head cannot say to the feet, “I don’t need you!” On the contrary, those parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, and the parts that we think are less honorable we treat with special honor. And the parts that are unpresentable are treated with special modesty, while our presentable parts need no special treatment. But God has put the body together, giving greater honor to the parts that lacked it, so that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other. If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it. Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it.

While tension may exist between religion and the hard sciences, religion and social work walk together like a hand in a glove. They share some values while parting ways concerning other values. Social work, in modern times, as a secular academic discipline might be motivated to the care of the world, and those in it, for reasons best described as altruism, or concern about the ways in which systems trap people who have been disenfranchised; the poor, the homeless, ethnic minorities, people of color, sexual minorities. This is so, while work which strives to benefit humanity which originates in

the church should be done with a sense that obedience to God; God's will, desire, and command, is the impetus for our actions. While the results of said work may look similar to the eye, the difference is seen in the heart, of which God alone is judge.

The collaboration of these worlds makes for a more wholistic work and ministry.

Further, the Social Constructivist framework, as understood and modeled within the academic discipline and praxis of social work, gives attention to the ways in which equitable amounts of time, attention, and consideration are given to those persons and communities which are to be beneficiaries of any particular act of service. Perhaps, too often attention is given to motives for service, and problems to be addressed, without taking into consideration the people who will be affected by the decision to become involved. The Social Constructivist framework helps to give shape, and boundaries, to engagement with communities which have been identified to be in crisis and or deficit. The needs, desires, perceptions, and shared understandings of persons and communities who have need should be taken into high consideration, when assessing how best to equip and serve them. Most important, are the voices of those who are to be served. What do those voices say about what problems might exist? How might communal wisdom inform a solution which will be lasting and beneficial for the community as a whole? Social Constructivist theory and framework, in a way, humanizes the humanity.

The emphasis of social work, in many instances is building, building people, building community, building structures of support, building awareness, building capacity. In the same way the focus of the church, in many instances is building, building healthy individuals, building healthy families, building healthy communities, building healthy congregations. Social Constructivism enters the picture with questions about

community, questions about the perspectives and voices of those who have been marginalized. In many ways, Social Constructivism is the voice in the space which poses the question, “How can we build together?” It begs the question about the means by which collaboration should be conducted with persons in community.

CHAPTER SIX

PROJECT ANALYSIS

“What will we do with Jesus?” In the Gospel attributed to Matthew, this question is placed in the mouth of Pontus Pilot? This question comes just before the Judeans cry out in response, “Crucify him! Crucify him!” For what would Jesus of Nazareth be crucified? After all, he was only Mary’s baby. He was brought into the world in the humblest of places, a cattle stall. What will we do with Jesus? He did proclaim himself to be the son of God, but that kind of language, that kind of posturing would not have been strange in that day. What infuriated the religious elites and the Judeans, on the whole, was not rooted solely in who, nor what he claimed to be, but the ways in which he proclaimed the reign and realm of God in their midst. This proclamation came through miracles, signs, wonders, disrupted economic structures, challenging cultural norms, and reframed theo-ethical precepts. This was worth crucifying.

The salvation provided in and through Jesus of Nazareth did not begin with his crucifixion on the place of the skull. The salvific work of Jesus did not begin with the passion narrative; the physical suffering of Jesus was a culmination of Jesus’ role in the salvation sequence. Jesus’ earthly ministry, comprised of teaching, healing, feeding, touching, and seeing, is used and abused in many Christian assemblies as ableist allegory for spiritual and ethereal morality. This is raised in an effort to enlighten, and or shame, the faithful into compliance with ecclesial dictums. Adherence to these dogmatic pronouncements isto win celestial rest and reward. These truths are not and will not be negated here. These truths, concerning eschatological and celestial reward for the faithful,

must, however, be amended to include the salvation, the redemption, the heavenly wholeness possible in the earthly realm.

Then Jesus summoned his twelve disciples and gave them authority over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to cure every disease and every sickness.... "As you go, proclaim the good news, 'The kingdom of heaven has come near.' Cure the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, cast out demons. You received without payment; give without payment." (Matt. 10:1, 7-8).

The claim, the mandate, Jesus placed on his disciples was to a ministry which saw and touched each aspect of the human person. So too should the followers of Jesus Christ heed the mandate to minister to the fullness of the human person in this present age. This all-encompassing ministry to which we are called seeks not only to save the soul, fill the stomach, and clothe the body. The ministry exercised by Jesus has implications for mental health, social justice, economic justice, food justice, access to health care, advocacy, and family systems. While it might not be feasible for one person, ministry, or congregation to attend to these facets alone, thanks be to God, the call is to work together, as the body of Christ, to accomplish Christ's work in the world.

This topic is of a great deal of personal interest. This interest and investment is due, in large part to a self-witness of the ravages of poverty; homelessness, food insecurity, mental health crisis, and physical health challenges. The personal pondering proceeds from biblical record of witness concerning God's will for those who might be considered one of "the least of these." Certainly, one who experiences such circumstances is in no way truly the least. However, wider society certainly does consider those persons less frequently and with less urgency. What would Jesus have to say or to do with these persons? It was seminary experience, then, which gave language for these questions. It was seminary, and other relationships borne of theological education, which

brought exposure to persons and ideas such as Howard Thurman, James Cone, Douglass John Hall, and Walter Rauschenbusch. It was Howard Thurman who gave particular and pithy verbiage for the question my soul had been asking since my childhood experience, witnessing people in levels of poverty that, to my young mind, were unfathomable. In his work *Jesus and the Disinherited*, Thurman posits the question, “What does our faith say to the masses of men whose backs are against the wall?”¹ With updates, for the sake of modernity and gender inclusivity, the question might be restated: What does Christian faith say to those women and men who find themselves pinned with their backs against the wall? Further, what comfort, what assurance does Christian praxis yield to those who live at the convergence of the armies of Egypt and the Red Sea?

Cone, and his thought-world of Black Liberation Theology, espouse two poignant professions concerning God’s Blackness and God’s steadfast alliance with those who are oppressed. In Douglass John Hall’s book, *The Cross in Our Context: Jesus and the Suffering World*, I found introduction to Martin Luther’s theologia crucis and Hall’s interpretation of that theological argument for the twenty-first century. In Walter Rauschenbusch, I found discussion of the Social Gospel which tended, not only to the souls of humankind, but also to lived realities. Perhaps chief among these were the sentiments of a great mentor and friend, The Rev. Traci D. Blackmon. In addition to the compassionate and grace-filled ways she preaches and teaches, she shared her practices of ministering to the needs of the community in which the congregation she serves, Christ the King United Church of Christ, sits. This pressed upon me the wider ministry of the church; ministering not to its own needs, solely, but to the real, tangible, temporal needs

¹ Howard Thurman, *Jesus and the Disinherited* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1996), 13.

of the persons who live without benefit of membership in the local church but not without need.

Moreover, it might be said that my passion for this brand of wholistic ministry comes from a personal quest for salvation. Salvation, at its core and without regard to sacred and theological meaning, deals with the work of wholeness. Perhaps this is better meted out in its Hebrew language counterpart, shalom. Often, ‘shalom’ is interpreted as peace. The peace conveyed in this interpretation often has a spiritual, and even metaphysical meaning. In the context of Christian worship, there is the passing of the peace in which the ‘peace’ of Christ is offered to fellow worshipers with a holy handshake and the scripted words, “The peace of Christ be with you.” To which a recipient is to respond, according to the script, “And also with you.” What could be meant here in this exchange? The only explanation which comports with logic is that the peace of Jesus, the anointed one of God, is merely spiritual; yielding feelings of ease, lack of discord, and freedom from anxiety. This cannot be the sole meaning of ‘shalom.’ It cannot simply be of ethereal affect. So many persons face anxiety and discord which finds its genesis not in the mind, but from within and their bodies, interpersonal realities, and lived social and systemic injustices.

In the *Journal of Psychology and Theology*, an article titled, “Theology and Thriving: Teleological Considerations Based on the Doctrines of Christology and Soteriology,” the word shalom is explained in more robust ways. Cornelius Plantinga describes the biblical concept of shalom as the “webbing together of God, humans, and

all creation in justice, fulfillment, and delight.”² At times shalom is simply defined as “peace,” but Plantinga makes clear that there is much more to this word than peace, shalom more accurately means “universal flourishing, wholeness, and delight” or, said differently, shalom is “the way things ought to be” and in this sense represents another candidate for a brief definition of humanity’s telos.³

It flows naturally, from the article, that the human purpose is for the work of shalom; the work of wholeness. It is the work of wholeness to which the human race is called. The work of shalom, the work of peace, the work of wholeness has implications beyond the world of the spirit and the world of the flesh. To borrow, once again, from the Hebrew language, the work of wholeness is, of and for, the Nephesh; It is the work of the entire being.

This project was carried out at the Baptist Pastor’s and Minister’s Conference of Philadelphia and Vicinity. Founded in 1894, the Baptist Minister’s Conference of Philadelphia and Vicinity was founded by Black Baptist Clergymen who desired to discuss the factors affecting the members in their congregations and the persons in the communities they served. The issues for discussion were the social, political, and economic factors which were of a great level of concern. It may well be said that the founding of this conference coincides with the first wave of the mass movement, of African Americans from the rural and agricultural South to the urban and industrialized

² Cornelius Plantinga Jr., *Not the Way It’s Supposed to Be: A Breviary of Sin* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1996), 10.

³ Tyler S. Greenway, Justin L. Barrett, and James L Furrow, “Theology and Thriving: Teleological Considerations Based on the Doctrines of Christology and Soteriology,” *Journal of Psychology and Theology* 44, no. 3 (Fall 2016): 179–89, accessed December 16, 2019, <http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=rft&AN=ATLAI GFE161107000571&site=ehost-live>.

North, called the Great Migration. The role some Northern Black churches took upon themselves was to act as waystations and resource centers to these Southerners who often found themselves ill-equipped and ill-informed to adapt to Northern environs. The minister's conference exists today, carrying forward much of the tradition instituted by the founders. The conference holds meetings in a church building of one of their members. The community in which the conference meets is, in large part, representative demographically of the membership served by the clergy members of the conference.

Biblically, there are two pericopes that were used to undergird the project. From the Old Testament comes the first scriptural reference, Deuteronomy 10:14-19. In this pericope, Moses receives the stone tablets, containing ten commandments, for a second time. Moses stands before the Children of Israel conveying nuance, which found its way into God's mouth but was omitted from the tablets. In this pericope, Moses says of God, "He executes justice for the fatherless and the widow, and loves the sojourner, giving him food and clothing. Love the sojourner; therefore, for you were sojourners in the land of Egypt" (Deut. 10:18-19). Here, following the giving of tablets of law and the oral delivery of the great commandment, we find a mandate to God's people, Israel, to care for those who are on the margins of their society. Those who find themselves and or have been forced to the margins have a special place in God's heart and on God's mind.

In the New Testament Gospel of Luke, in the tenth chapter, is the representation of a parable that Jesus constructs in response to a Jewish man who desires to challenge his understanding of those to whom God's law, concerning neighborliness, applies. To the challenge Jesus tells a story about a man who had been beaten, robbed, left for dead,

and the compassion he received from a passerby. In some instances, the man who fell into the hands of misfortune received little consideration and no compassion.

Jesus casts a Samaritan as the one who comes to the wounded man's rescue. In this narrative, Jesus radically expands the idea of who 'neighbor' is, and who is to be afforded the privileged benefits of neighborliness. While Jewish ideas concerning to whom it was worth being a neighbor were limited, to those within community of faith and ethnicity, Jesus offers an expansion of this precept to all who stand in need of care and consideration. Jesus, instead of answering the query of the man who sought to challenge him, responded by offering a challenge, to disciple himself in the way of the Samaritan. In the same way, the church of Jesus Christ is called to expend resource on those who are in need, in a spirit of radical and overwhelming hospitality.

In the historical chapter, I make the case concerning the mass migration of people of African descent from the Southern to the Northern states. This movement of peoples is reflected in historical memory as 'The Great Migration.' In this movement, persons who sought to extricate themselves from oppression, codified in law and socially sanctioned, and to empower themselves, their families, and their plight with social and economic capital by securing work, moved to Northern urban centers. When these migrants arrived, ill equipped for their new environs, it was Black community, namely Black Churches, who came to their aid. The most profound occurrence is that of the Olivet Baptist Church in Chicago which deployed social workers in an aim to assess and meet the needs of their neighbors from the South. In this instance, the church comes to the aid of the Southern neighbor who stands in need of great resource and cannot fend for their own needs. This chapter calls for a rekindling of the practice of hospitality to the Southern neighbor;

however, the neighbor may, no longer, be from the South, and may not be inclined to connection with the local church. The neighbor is all around, in community and out.

In the theological foundation, I explored the Social Gospel as a movement and Walter Rauschenbusch as premier witness to the theological construction of that movement. The modern theological development of Rauschenbusch, as minister, man, and theologian, in large part to his vicarious and firsthand experience of hardship at his local church, Second German Baptist Church, in Hell's Kitchen. It was in this place, that he witnessed the suffering, struggle, grief, and anguish induced by poverty and the systems that impoverished his congregants. He realized that the gospel of Jesus Christ must be for them, in ways not limited to the salvation of their souls. In an episode of revelation, Rauschenbusch heard the "Lord's Prayer" in a new way; and with linguistic emphasis to which he had not before given attention. It was the statement on the coming of the kingdom of God which prompted his theological exploration of the ways in which the kingdom of God might be made manifest for those whose lived experience was that of disinheritance.

In the interdisciplinary foundation, I offered an exploration into the field of social work. More specifically, I offered an exploration of the Social Constructivist theory within social work as a conversation partner concerning the ways in which intervention might be offered to those persons who stand in need as neighbors and strangers. The Social Constructivist lens is focused on psychological impact upon persons receiving intervention. This view privileges the interaction, investment, and wisdom of those in community receiving intervention. In this way, the intervention relies, in great extent, upon relationship and an investment of interventionists into the communities to which

they seek to affect change. Perhaps this methodology is not an ideal mode for intervention of congregations within the communities in which they reside and seek to serve. However, this method might serve as a corrective upon churches who seek to engage and impose service, in Jesus' name, without the mediators of communication, investment, and relationship.

While the era of the great migration is long ended, persons in church and community remain in need of the church to function as a waystation and resource center, for persons with and without, the benefit of church membership. The need remains for congregations to be of use in the wholistic work of salvation, which regards the wellbeing of the entire being of individuals and their communities. The city of Philadelphia, the city in which this project was executed, is the largest city in the state of Pennsylvania and the fifth largest city in the United States of America. Of the largest cities in the United States, Philadelphia is the poorest. Persons in Philadelphia are in need of intervention and advocacy from those institutions who, while not having all resources, can act to provide a portion of the justice or charity to allow people to live well for another day.⁴

In the city of "Brotherly Love and Sisterly Affection," who better than the Church of Jesus Christ to participate in the salvific work, to which Jesus calls us to participate, of caring, providing, and advocating for the spectrum of human need. Yes, this includes the work of caring for the soul. This also includes the work of provision of daily bread. If the members of the Baptist Pastor's and Minister's Conference of Philadelphia and Vicinity are informed of the theological and sociological implication of salvation and of the

⁴ "Quick Facts," U.S. Census Bureau, accessed December 15, 2019, <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/philadelphiacountypennsylvania>.

Kingdom of God, their understanding will be positively augmented, as to the wider scope of salvation encompassing wholeness of mind, body, and soul.

Methodology

To test this hypothesis, I developed a survey which is neither solely quantitative nor qualitative. This survey was designed to be a hybrid qualitative and quantitative survey. A survey was delivered before and after educational sessions. In the educational sessions, information sourced from scriptural, theological, and historical realms was presented. This was done with the aim of educating and convincing the members of the Baptist Pastor's and Ministers Conference of Philadelphia and Vicinity of the truth of the propositions that salvation is a wholistic endeavor which concerns the soul and the needs of the body. Further, the sessions proposed that the local church is called to participate in the work of salvation by and through ministries of charity and justice. Will a didactic presentation on the expansive and wholistic nature of salvation positively augment the understanding and desire of the members of the Baptist Pastors and Minister's Conference of Philadelphia and Vicinity? This project gathered data, using a mixed methods approach, from the members of the Baptist Pastor's and Minister's Conference of Philadelphia and Vicinity. This data was collected via surveys, pre and post, which will pose various questions concerning salvation, the work of the church, and the nature of God. Following the initial survey, I presented scholarship from the historical, biblical and theological foundation chapters. Participants coded their surveys and the information was further coded and interpreted by me, as principal investigator.

To make clear the reasoning that a hybrid survey is best for obtaining data for this project, I must layout the strengths of each and the reasons why a pure method data collection would not have been suitable for the context of the Baptist Pastor's and Minister's Conference of Philadelphia and Vicinity and for this project. In the third edition of *Essential Research Methods for Social Work*, Rubin and Babbie outline qualitative and quantitative methods of research and data gathering. Per Rubin and Babbie's text, quantitative research methods typically seek to produce precise and generalizable findings while qualitative methods of research are more flexible and allow research procedures to evolve.⁵

The quantitative method of data collection does a superb service in collecting data which is objective and can be extrapolated to make generalizations about an entire population. The qualitative method of data collection creates room for the subjective; the thought, values, and opinions of those being surveyed. The qualitative data collection, because it allows for the subjective input of individuals, cannot, nor should it, be used to project data for the whole. The hybrid survey allows for the best of both worlds. This survey type gathers data which allows for objectivity and makes space for subjective elements. The Baptist Pastors' and Ministers' Conference of Philadelphia and Vicinity is an association of persons, clergy and lay, who give leadership to congregations. Therefore, I had a desire and a duty to do two things; record data which is objective, and is able to give an accurate representation of the whole, and make room for the voices of these faithful and compassionate women and men, who strive to faithfully execute their ministries each day. It is my hope that this collection of hard data, tempered by the voices

⁵ Allen Rubin and Earl J. Babbie, *Essential Research Methods for Social Work*, 3rd ed. (Pacific Grove, CA: Brooks Cole Cengage Learning, 2013), 40.

of the members of the conference, yielded a substantive and multi-faceted view of those who have elected to enter the survey pool and to those who chose not to participate.

The quantitative components of the surveys were composed of three key divisions, with the hopes of yielding a fullness of objective data. The three components of the survey were Demographic Information, Benevolence, and The Nature of Salvation. In the section labeled Demographic Information, I collected information concerning age, ordination status, education, and congregation size. These informational pieces allowed for an interpretation of the conference body; concerning who they are, and the extent to which they have received formal education. This information also provided insight into the resources of people, finance, and staffing which might impact the capacity of a given individual or congregation to participate in the work of wholistic salvation. Although this participation may only consist of a few hours at a food bank, or voter registration drive, sometimes a limited institutional bandwidth can make what is feasible for most, impossible for some. The section labeled Benevolence sought to gain insight concerning attitudes toward the work of charity involving the local church on behalf of those who are in need. The final section, labeled The Nature of Salvation, was developed with the intention of assessing the further theological point that salvation, and its work, places a burden, on the believer and each outpost of the kingdom of God, to participate in works of charity, justice, and empowerment as a means to persons experiencing heaven in their daily lived realities.

The qualitative component of the data gathering endeavor, involved the inclusion of two components, focus groups and blanks for written response. The focus groups were

convened at the conclusion of each educational module. I will say more concerning the educational modules later.

In the focus groups, the goal was gathering feedback, of challenge to or agreeance with, the material presented within the sessions. Participation in these talkback sessions was not compulsory; persons were free to respond, or not, as inspired by the content presented. The fillable blank, present on the post survey allowed for participants to contribute any closing thoughts and opinions concerning the projects implementation, participation, ponderings, and or revelations. These qualitative components helped to give nuance to the data set.

Project Implementation

Project implementation agenda:

- Gathering
- Consent
- Pre-survey
- Module I – Historical
- Focus Group I
- Module II – Biblical
- Focus Group II
- Module III - Theological
- Focus Group III
- Post Survey

On the day of the implementation of the project, persons who had been contacted by personal invitation, public announcement, word of mouth, and digital means, assembled in the sanctuary of the Mount Olive Baptist Church in the Mantua Neighborhood of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Following words of greeting and explanation of the sequence of events for the session of experimentation, I distributed forms for obtaining informed consent from all persons assembled. After going through the consent form, line by line, I fielded any and all questions and collected all signed consent forms. The consent forms contained general information about the rights of the participant, the means of data collection, and the ways in which the data collected would be utilized and stored for the purposes of the project reporting and confidentiality.

Following the gathering of consent, I distributed the pre-survey. After, the distribution of the pre-survey, I led the group of participants in a reading of the survey questions and made myself available to answer any questions regarding the meaning and intent of questions present on the survey. I also instructed the project participants on the means by which they were to code the survey. The coding of the survey was intended to protect the anonymity of each of the participants. Each survey was coded with a combination only identifiable by the individual who created it. After participants coded and completed their surveys, to whichever degree they elected to complete them, the surveys were collected.

I delivered the content of the first educational module. This module, called historical was drawn, regarding content, from the information presented in the historical section of the thesis. This entailed a discussion of the Great Migration period in which African Americans from the rural and agricultural southern states migrated to the urban

and industrialized northern states for the purpose of economy, opportunity, and escaping racial discrimination and persecution encoded in Black Codes and Jim Crow laws. In the early period of this movement, the Baptist Pastors' and Ministers' Conference of Philadelphia and Vicinity was founded in Philadelphia to address the social, political, and economic realities of the persons within congregation and community. I mentioned the likelihood that the founding of the conference may have been fueled by the influx of migrants, filling their pews and communities.

Immediately following the first module, I led those assembled in a focus group session concerning the information presented in the module. The focus group was conducted in an informal manner; persons were invited to contribute as they offered feedback. The only prompt issued was a request for feedback concerning what project participants heard and experienced in the module. The comments offered from project participants were wide ranging. Comments offered ranged from cursory thanks for the presentation, considerations for future presentation, and contributions to make the presentation more robust and impactful for those in attendance.

Feedback offered to the first module was rich and varied. There was free flowing dialogue which was sparked by the material presented and from the personal experiences of persons in attendance. Many of the personal reflections offered were of project participants who had themselves been part of the later waves of the great migration or who had ancestors, parents and grandparents, who moved from rural areas in Southern states to larger cities in the North in search of economic opportunity and the freedom of movement. One participant in the project shared that he moved to Philadelphia from a small Southern town and rose to the leadership of a Philadelphia association of clergy.

Further, this participant disclosed that he had been called a “country bumkin” when he became president of this clergy organization. Participants also raised inquiry concerning clergy figures in the city of Philadelphia, during the great migration period, who were of great importance in helping Black Philadelphians secure city jobs and contract work. In this way, the Rev. E. Luther Cunningham, Pastor of St. Paul’s Baptist Church from 1937-1964 and Civil Service Commissioner for the City of Philadelphia, was able to offer the magnitude of resource to empower Black persons in Philadelphia, resident and migrant alike.⁶

Following the first focus group, I delivered the content of the second educational module. This module, called biblical, was drawn, regarding content, from the information presented in the biblical foundation chapter of the thesis. This entailed a discussion of two biblical texts through which I sought to elucidate God’s voice, through the mouths of Moses and Jesus. The words in these mouths were commands from God to care for those whose lives and existences are spent teetering on the margins of society. I presented the biblical texts, gave comments as to their meaning and claim on those for whom hearing and heading God’s command was important.

Following the second module, participants offered reflection, spurred by the content of the biblical module. Included in the content of the second module was commentary concerning the gulf between God’s command to care for the widow, the orphan, and the stranger in our midst while current political policies, supported even by persons claiming to be the religious right, criminalize persons seeking refuge and asylum in the United States of America. One of the participants remarked, “[Our] evangelical

⁶ James Wolfinger, *Philadelphia Divided: Race and Politics in the City of Brotherly Love* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2007), 231.

brothers and sisters have become more pharisaic...espousing separation and not inclusion.” This participant also issued a word of caution, lest those present become hypercritical and hypocritical falling into the same moralistic trap into which the “evangelicals” have fallen. Another participant raised commentary and personal reflections on a practical note concerning making room for persons experiencing homelessness into congregation and community. This participant remarked on the sensation of smell and the factor which that plays. Discussed was the need to look past the smell, or any other factors, which might incline us to turn up our proverbial noses at persons whose lives, social status, or economic power is not a reflection of our own. Another participant offered that a sense of “self-righteousness and arrogance” also smells unsavory in the nostrils of God and humans.

In the third educational module, called Theological, I presented content, drawn from the theological portion of the thesis. This session allowed for a conversation concerning Walter Rauschenbusch, The Social Gospel, and the Kingdom of God. This section ended with reflections concerning what it might mean to make the kingdom of God reality in both the eschaton and in our lifetime. I highlighted Rauschenbusch’s theological argument that salvation is borne in a spirit of generosity while sin comes from an attitude of selfishness. I ended the third module with the words, the work of the cross is done, but there is lots of work to be done in the street. Immediately following the third module, I led those assembled in a focus group session concerning the information presented in the module. Participants conveyed a desire to see these tenets discussed within their congregations and communities.

At the conclusion of the educational sessions, a post-survey was issued. In many ways, the post-survey was a mirror of the pre-survey. In other ways the post survey provided renewed perspectives on questions as to give a possibility for changed perspectives. This survey also worked to gather responses as to the understanding of salvation, the Kingdom of God, and the role of the church in doing this work. This survey had a qualitative component which called for feedback concerning any item to which the respondent desired to make comment. Following the collection of survey responses, the responses were tallied, recorded, and analyzed. The anticipated end of the project is that the clergy of the conference will reengage their congregations and communities, with additional burden and understanding about this ministry, held in trust by earthen vessels, and concerning salvation and the continuing work of salvation and the role that the church of Jesus Christ should play in this work.

Summary of Learning

What I learned from the project data has a great level of nuance. This is to say that variables, unexpected and unpredicted, presented themselves in the population surveyed. This made for intriguing data analysis. Of the seventeen persons who participated in the project, two persons were in the twenty to forty age range, four persons were forty-one to sixty, ten persons were aged sixty-one to eighty and one person was aged eighty-one to ninety. This finding alerted me to the fact that the vast majority of those surveyed, and perhaps the vast majority of those who are pastors, ministers, and church leaders who associate with the Baptist Pastors' and Ministers' Conference of Philadelphia and Vicinity are sixty-one to eighty years of age. This could reflect generational distinctions

and understandings concerning what it means to be a Christian, what it means to be the church, and what it might mean to be an advocate on behalf of those persons who are often marginalized. Perhaps, this is connected to a generation of persons who witnessed and participated in the African American movement for civil rights and Black Power. This result, the overwhelming number of persons participating in this survey being aged sixty-one to eighty, makes me curious about the ways in which the whole of the data set was influenced and or skewed by this grouping of persons.

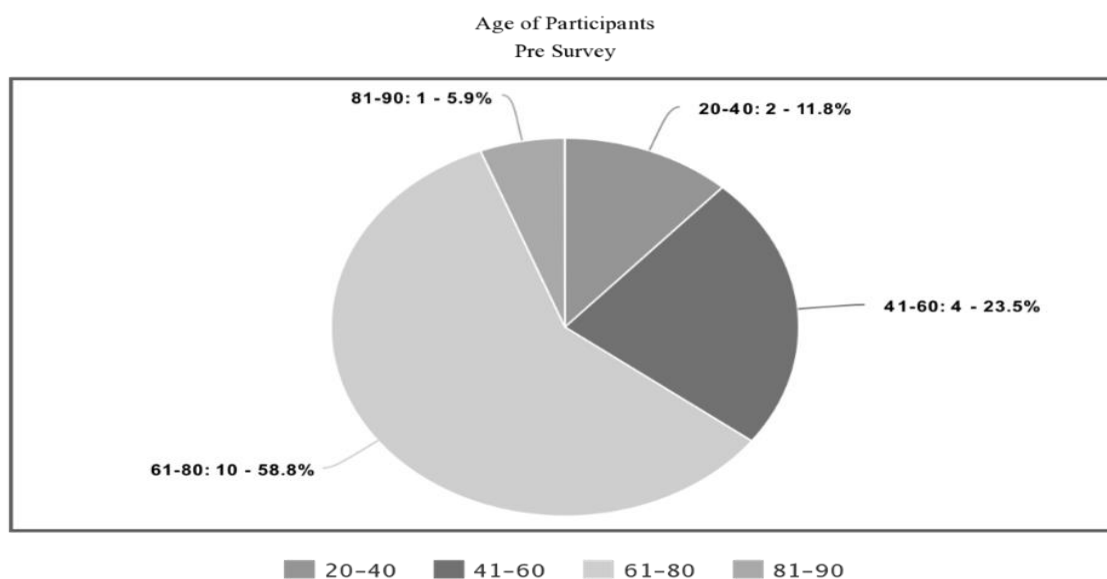


Figure 1. Pre-survey age of participants

I learned a good deal about the educational level and ordination status of those being surveyed. The type of people, even within a larger group, such as the Baptist Pastor's and Minister's Conference of Philadelphia and Vicinity, who might choose to engage this type of project and surveys are interested in making their voices heard and interested in the subject matter. These persons may have chosen to enter the survey pool because of their passion for the subject matter.

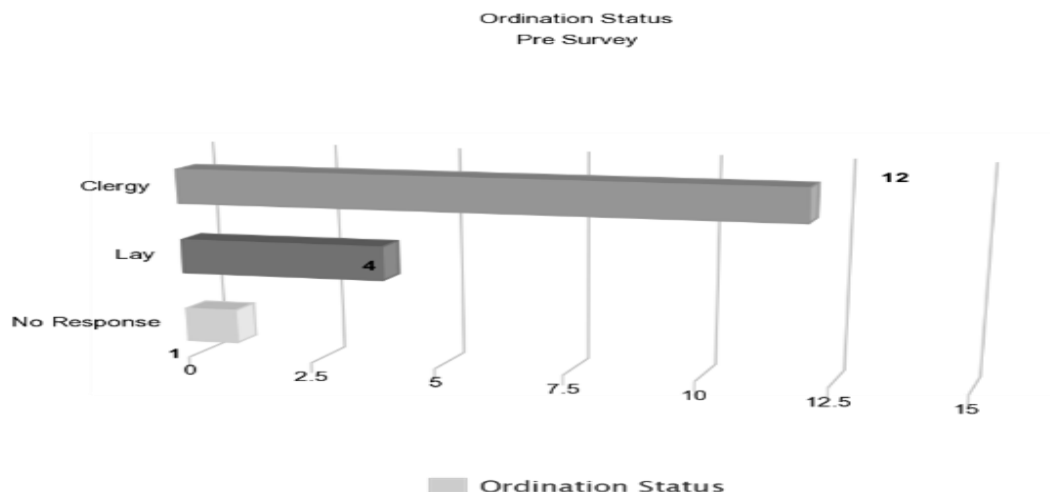


Figure 2. Pre-survey ordination status

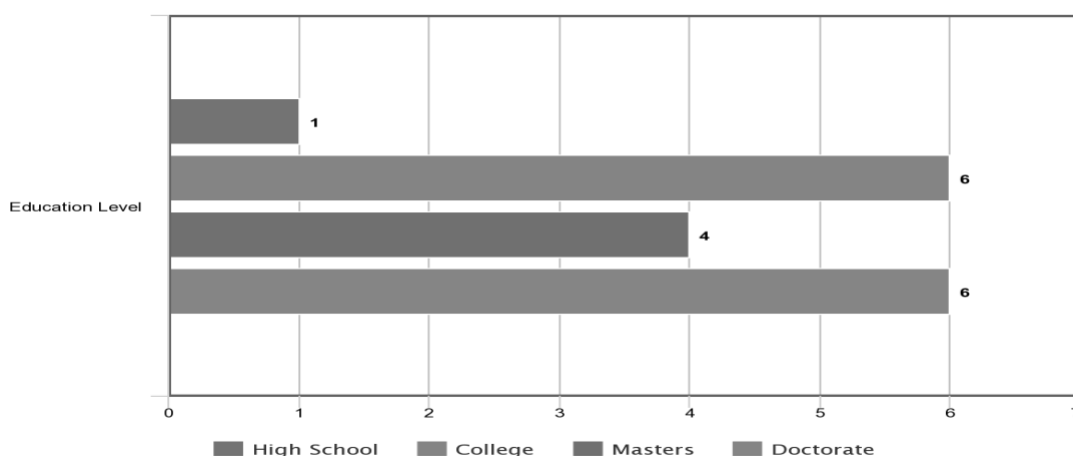


Figure 3. Pre-survey education level

Those who participated in the project were able to learn about the ways in which the founding of the Baptist Pastors' and Ministers' Conference coincided with the influx of African American migrants from the American South. Participants also engaged in learning the role of the church in settlement of these migrants from the American South. As voiced by more than one participant, they were able to connect the dots concerning their family's journey north as part of this great migration period. The participants learned about Walter Rauschenbusch and his role as a proponent of the theological component of the Social Gospel Movement. Participants were interested to learn his

history of engagement in the local church which was, for him, a catalyst for the transformation of his theological perspective. The participants learned about the ways in which scripture affirms God's desire to care for those who are marginalized; and how those who hear and heed God's command have a claim on their lives to care for those for whom God cares.

The hypothesis was supported in this experiment. Although the quantity of persons whose perspective shifted was not great, in the areas where there was room for growth, participants shifted positively.

For example, one of the primary questions used to assess the respondent's exposure to caring for those who are poor and needy concerned their congregations use, or non-use, of an offering for benevolence. It was expected that most respondents would reply to the question positively in the pre-survey. My hope was that following the pre-survey, any persons who responded negatively to the question concerning a benevolent offering in the pre-survey would respond affirmatively in the post-survey. This was done, not with the expectation that an individual could return to their congregation to immediately change the culture and add a benevolent offering, but that the respondent might see the need for the inclusion of an offering for benevolence. Of the seventeen survey participants, all seventeen persons indicated that benevolence was important, and that their congregations collected a benevolent offering. In the post-survey, then, respondents remained unmoved in their responses. This survey query resulted in affirmative, desired, responses, but these responses were not affected by the didactic instruction offered.

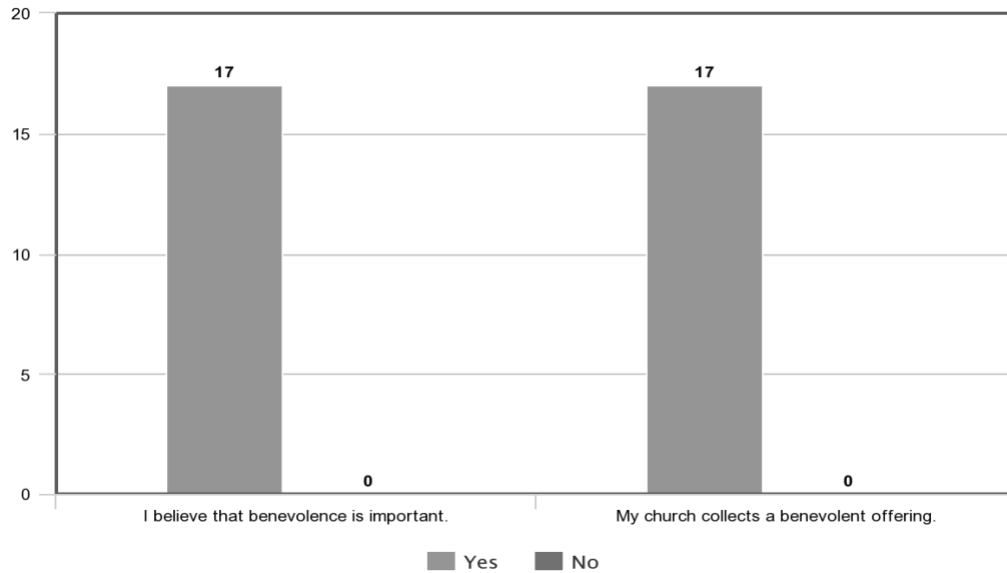


Figure 4. Post-survey responses to question regarding benevolent offering

In a similar attempt, the survey posed three questions to respondents concerning salvation. The first question concerning salvation asked respondents about the importance of salvation in Christian Ministry. The second question, geared to assess beliefs concerning salvations meaning and purpose, pre didactic, asked, “What is salvation?” To this question, respondents could answer, (A.) Deliverance from sin and death, (B.) Reclaiming and redeeming persons from sinful and death dealing systems, or (C.) Both. Third, was a question concerning the meaning of salvation. Participants were given the opportunity to respond, (A.) To have heaven in view, (B.) To be whole and well, and (C.) Both. To these questions, respondents offered answers which were more fragmented than the previous sections responses concerning benevolence. The results of the post-survey revealed positive increments of change affected by the didactic session.

Table 1. Pre-survey responses to question regarding salvation

How important is salvation in the context of Christian Ministry? Pre-Survey	
Essential	16 persons

Peripheral	1 person
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Table 2. Post-survey responses to question regarding salvation

How important is salvation in the context of Christian Ministry? Post Survey	
Essential	17 persons
Peripheral	0 person

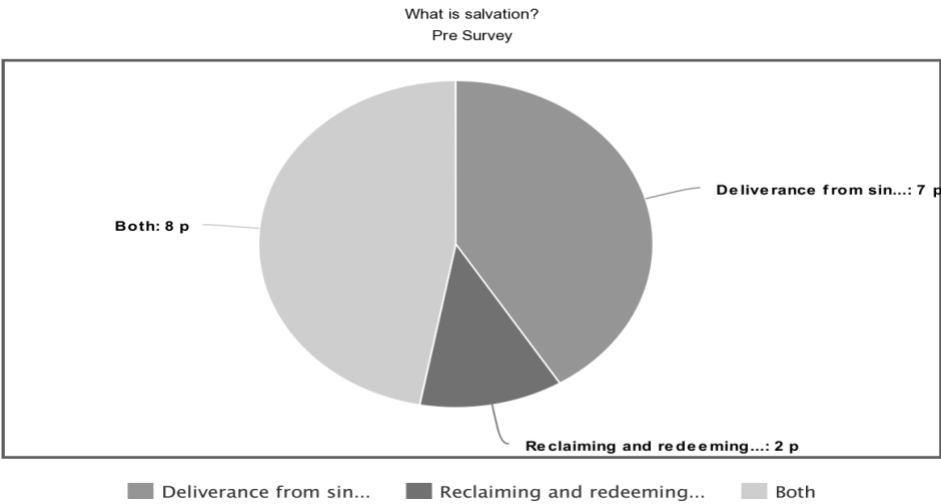


Figure 5. Pre-survey results for question regarding salvation

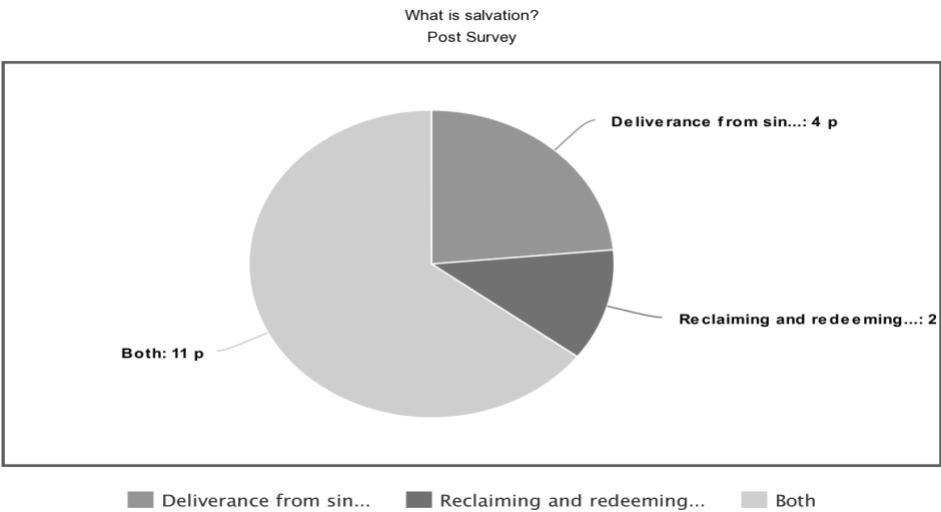


Figure 6. Post-survey results for question regarding salvation

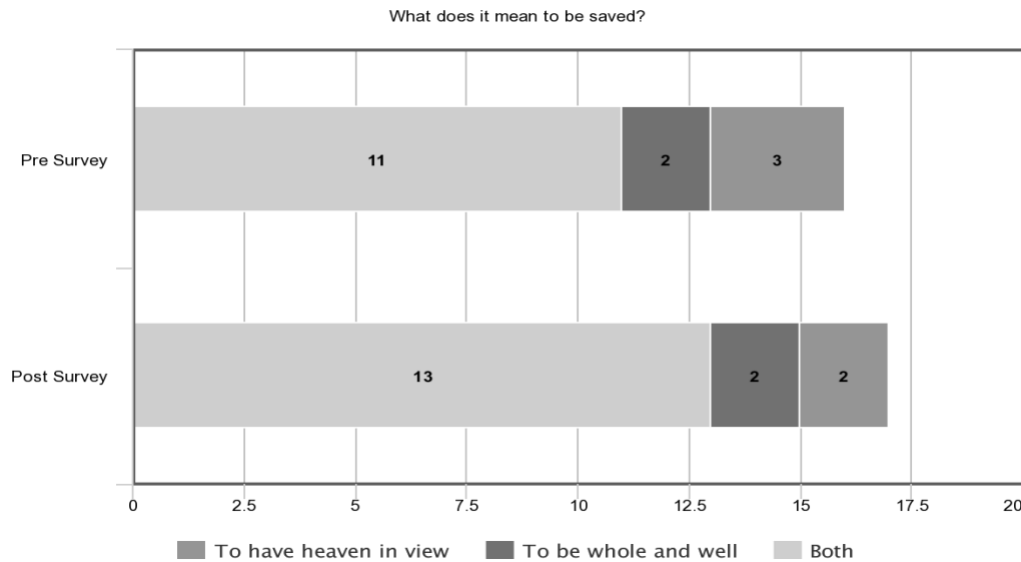


Figure 7. Survey results for question regarding the meaning of being saved

Conclusion

In all, the project was successful in that members of the Baptist Pastor's and Minister's Conference of Philadelphia and Vicinity, after having received the biblical, historical, and theological modules, did increase in their understanding about the ways in which salvation encompasses the whole person, and the mandate of the local church to participate in that work. The data, in a raw form can paint a deceptive picture which might appear to indicate little change. In this instance, it was the small changes which were important. Most survey respondents were theologically educated persons with master's degrees. These persons may have received their theological education from institutions in which tenants of the Social Gospel are part of the rudimentary curriculum. The small amount of noticeable change was due to persons in the survey population already having knowledge and a level of acceptance of the information conveyed in the educational modules. For those who indicated negative answers on the pre-survey, in some, there was positive motion.

In future surveys, I would be sure to ask questions which allow more room for nuance. The use of (True), (False), (Yes), (No), in large part was used to give ease of understanding to the respondents. Perhaps, more room is needed to indicate growth and change in thought. In the survey, respondents were asked to indicate change, real or potential, change in practice. These persons are responding as leaders of, and leaders within, congregations. Institutional change is often slow and progressive. It is not necessarily indicative of failure in didactic mode for an individual to decline practice with institutional structures, in the pre-survey and decline those same practices in the post-survey. This is especially true, in view of the ways in which congregations shift, grow, manage and allocate resources.

In future projects, I would see the benefit in further contextualizing the didactic information to the place and people receiving education. I received feedback from respondents that they were curious and wanted to hear more about Black Baptist Churches in the city of Philadelphia and their role of activity in welcoming persons in the Great Migration. I am unsure if this information would provide greater impetus for theological growth and programmatic adjustment, but perhaps being reminded of an active history may inspire, in greater way, persons and congregations to aspire to a glorious return of programming of wholistic salvation and rescue.

Further, and perhaps most importantly, I view this project to have been a success, because of the theological conversation and debate sparked within the pastors, church leaders, clergy and lay of the conference. Stated, following the project implementation, was a desire for more of this sort of substantive theological conversation. The conversation, sparked by this proceeding, that had the most traction was a debate about

the apparent poles of justice and morality. Clergy present stated their observations of what other clergy, other congregations, other denominations, and other movements say and do when enacting and advocating works of justice in the world. Other clergy present made mention of a “Ministry of Referrals” in which congregations who do not have the physical and or financial capacity to meet the needs which they observe are present in wider community, provide referrals to resource outside of church walls and perhaps within secular spheres might be offered as resources.

In this age, the church is poised to be a center of help, hope, and resource. The work of the church is the work of Jesus. The work of Jesus was, and remains the work of establishing the kingdom of God. This kingdom must be established, as Jesus taught, “...on earth as it is in heaven.” The work of the kingdom of God is the work of shalom; the work of wholeness. This work is not only the work and transformation which occurs in the soul. This transformation, the work of the kingdom is to be realized in present reality. Jesus claimed that his kingdom was not of this world. His claim was never that his kingdom was not in the world. In waiting for the “roll call up yonder,” without engaging the world and the fullness of humanities need, the church acts as an unfaithful partner and witness to and with the God who calls God’s people to open their hearts, care for the widow, protect the orphan, and advocate for the stranger in their midst.

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